LIFE STORY NARRATIVES OF ETHIOPIAN WOMEN ACTIVISTS

THE JOURNEY TO FEMINIST ACTIVISM

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Abstract

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Life story narratives of Ethiopian women activists: the journey to feminist activism

Keywords
Feminism, activism, African-feminism, gender, patriarchy, Ethiopia, life-story-narratives, subaltern, revolution, armed-struggle

Through the life story narratives of Ethiopian women activists, this research explores the journey of Ethiopian women activists during three political and historical periods (1955–1974; 1974–1991; 1991–2015). Thus, the study proposes a new perspective on the forms of Ethiopian women's activism and subsequently the different types of feminism emerging from their narratives.

Through examination of how the activists reflect on, reconstruct and give meaning to their life stories, this research unravels that their activism is informed by feminist principles. It also exposes that it is shaped by a long history of resistance to patriarchy, which enabled women in traditional Ethiopia to negotiate a certain level of "autonomy and liberty". Contrary to the general expectation, the research demonstrates that the process of modernization (read: westernization) came with its own structure based on western patriarchy, and reinforced local patriarchy. In this new, formalized patriarchy, the rights that women had negotiated through their resistance in earlier times were diminished.

This study on women activists, categorized for the purpose of this research as pioneers, revolutionaries and negotiators, suggests that Ethiopian women activists have since adopted different forms of engagement that tend to improve the social, cultural, economic and political conditions of Ethiopian women. Consequently, I argue that, while Ethiopian women's activism and feminism is firmly embedded in the history of resistance of previous generations of Ethiopian women, the form of activism varies according to the political and historical context in which the activists negotiate and adapt the way they act.

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First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the women activists who agreed to share their journey in activism. I appreciate their willingness to do so, and, in the process, to sometimes recall sad and painful experiences, which for some remain difficult to relive. Nevertheless, they did agree to see it through, as part of another activist engagement, and to make sure that at least this time their testimonies would be recorded as part of the collective history. The women in this research firmly believe in the equality of women with men and struggle to improve women's lives across the political, economic, social and cultural life of their nation and beyond. These women, whom I have identified as the revolutionaries and negotiators, are my inspirations and my role models.

I want to thank my principal supervisor, Professor Donna Pankhurst, for her academic guidance and for finding the right words of encouragement on this journey. I thank her for understanding my challenges in terms of balancing my family life with my research endeavours. I am grateful to Dr Fiona Macaulay, my associate supervisor, who supervised my progress during the absence of my principal supervisor. I also want to extend my gratitude to those who have accompanied me on this journey from the beginning. Professor Andreas, I thank you for the concise input that has allowed me to make my points more clearly. Dr Donna Petras, thank you for the moral support and for reading my first pages during your visits to Ethiopia.

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I want to dedicate this research to my children, Mahakit, Naod and Alia-Hiwet, who, I hope, will believe in and fight for a better and just world. I want to tell them that I appreciate their cooperation at times when they were told to “keep quiet” and “leave your mother alone” so that I could work. Thank you for your support and understanding.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AU	African Union
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
AWiB	Association of Women in Business
CERTWID	Centre for Research, Training and Information for Women in Development
COPWE	Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia
CRDA	Christian Relief and Development Association (Ethiopia)
CW	corporate women
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
EDL	Ethiopian Democratic League
EFA	Education For All
EPA	Ethiopian Patriots Association
EPDM	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPRA	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
ESANA	Ethiopian Students Association in North America
ESUE	Ethiopian Students Union in Europe
ESUNA	Ethiopian Students Union in North America
EWLA	Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association
EMWA	Ethiopian Media Women's Association
EWVSA	Ethiopian Women's Volunteer Service Association
EWWA	Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGM	female genital mutilation
FSS	Forum for the Social Sciences
GAD	Gender and Development
HBF	Heinrich Boell Foundation
HR	human resources
HTP	harmful traditional practice
IGA	income-generating activities
IHA-UDP	Integrated Holistic Approach – Urban Development Programme
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IWD	International Women's Day
LIW	low-income women
LLB	Legum Baccalaureus (Bachelor of Law)
MBA	Master of Business Administration
Meison	All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (in Amharic)
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoUDH	Ministry of Urban Development and Housing
MoWCYA	Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs

NEWA	Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations
NGO	non-governmental organization
NUEUS	National Union of Ethiopian University Students
NWP	New Women's Party
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OPDO	Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PM	prime minister
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PR	public relations
REWA	Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
TADU	Tigray Agricultural Development Unit
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
UDA	urban dwellers association
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM/UNDFW	United Nations Development Fund for Women
USUAA	Union of University Students in Addis Ababa
WAO	Women's Affairs Office
WID	Women in Development
WISE	Women in Self-Help Employment
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Time after time, Ethiopian women have come to the foreground and participated in times of crisis, such as Italy's numerous attempts at colonization, the 1974 Revolution, and the resistance to the military dictatorship, and "retreated" to the background in more normal times. Although their participation is generally acknowledged in oral history, it remains hidden and often unrecorded. Moreover, no research has attempted to capture whether and how feminist consciousness has emerged among Ethiopian women activists. Therefore, this study aspires to fill the gap.

> Kiflu Tadesse, who has witnessed these things abroad and at home, did not find it important enough to write about the numerous dead and maimed women, or about the countless females beaten black and blue, or those left hanging from the ceilings, or about those crippled as a result of hideous torture. Their ordeal remains un-chronicled, unless we ourselves write it. I find it hard to give credence to claims that women were given the opportunity to participate in the movement as far back as 1973 when a recently written work makes no mention of women's contribution to the struggle. Maybe male students have gone a long way in reading profoundly, in refining both their ideology and attitude; if so, I would be the first to applaud them. However, this change has in no way been reflected to the question of women. (Original, quoted in Bahru[1] 2010: 125–126)

This is what Original Wolde Giorgis, former Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) member, had to say with regard to women's role and contribution within her organization. With this quote, Original illustrates how some parts of history are pushed to the margins: in this case, the role of women activists in the revolutionary movement. Furthermore, she exposes how, despite women's significant role "in EPRP –armed– squads and activities", Original reaffirms, "it was most assuredly true that even those male members of EPRP reputed to be well-read never accepted female leadership" (as quoted in Bahru 2010: 125). Moreover, she adds that questions related to gender were not raised either, and nor was women's full

[1] All Ethiopian authors are cited by their surnames, as there are no forenames in Ethiopia. Identification is made through the use of the father and grandfather's surnames.

participation in the Revolution or their active resistance during the Red Terror[2] recognized.

Many scholars have exposed the scarcity of knowledge-based literature on African women in general and Ethiopian women in particular. Shimelis (2014: 7) acknowledges the "historiographical 'erasure' or elision" of Ethiopian women's revolutionary experience, which could have provided a gendered perspective on the Ethiopian Revolution. Bizuneh (2001: 8) refers to the absence of academic research that explores the historical experience of Ethiopian women and highlights the fact that when the few studies that exist on women have been published, "the discussions were generally ahistorical".[3] More recent works have tried to fill this gap. While, Alem (2008), a former member of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM), attempts a brief narration of women's role in Ethiopian history, Hiwet (2012) tries to include the absent voices of the Ethiopian revolutionary women by narrating an autobiographical account of her path to activism and her journey within the revolutionary movement. Biseswar (2008) notes the absence of feminist leadership among the educated/intellectual Ethiopian women of today.

Consequently, through the application of the subaltern method, which values the absent voices of history, this study aims to contribute to filling this gap. This research is not about how to bring about social change, but, rather, is intended to explore the perception and experiences of women who have participated in multiple social, economic and political actions, including armed struggle, during the last six decades. Hence, consistent with the subaltern approach, the use of a feminist epistemology based on the women

[2] According to Gebru (2009: 42), the Red Terror consisted of "purges and assassinations that began in July 1976 and culminated in the ascension of Major Mengistu Haile Mariam as undisputed leader on 11th February 1977, a week after the murder of the titular chairman of the PMAC, Brigadier General Teferi Banti, and six other key members of the council in a palace shootout. This marked the end of collective leadership and the creation of personal dictatorship more tyrannical than monarchical autocracy".

[3] Bizuneh (2001) illustrates his point by examining the bibliography of the 1994 special issue of the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, "Proceedings of the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies" (volumes 1–9 and 11), in which he found that of a total of 494 published articles, only 12 articles treated subjects related to women, and did so most often in relation to women's reproductive health and/or their roles and participation in crafts.

activists' perceptions, thoughts and representations of their reality was valuable for revealing their stories. In this way, this research makes a methodological shift, bringing new perspectives on feminism by focusing on Ethiopian women activists' experiences. Thus, this research deliberately attempts to understand how women have become activists and experienced activism in three historical periods. The best way is thus to explore how the experts, the activists themselves, reflect on and reconstruct their life stories and give meaning to their personal experiences. Ultimately, through the examination of the activists' narratives, the study tries to trace feminism in Ethiopia.

The modest ambition of this research project is to contribute to feminist studies in general by shedding light on the modalities of women's engagement in Ethiopian activist history. Moreover, this research will contribute both to the social movement and to feminist conceptualizations through the exploration of the role of Ethiopian women in the process of social change. Finally, it is also my hope that this investigation, which is closer to historical sociology, can contribute to what Pereira (2005: 17) identifies as "women's history, biography and autobiography", in which the "content of women's lives" contributes to "a more informed understanding of history [which] could serve the present".

A feminist project

In 2004, I moved back to Ethiopia after more than 15 years abroad, which consequently exposed me to different cultures and knowledge bases. Moreover, when I applied for the PhD programme in the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, I was employed at the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), a women-centred association committed to improving the legal, social and political life of Ethiopian women. As the association's public relations (PR) programme coordinator, I had the opportunity of meeting and sometimes working with women activists representing different women's organizations. This has consequently contributed to my interest in focusing my study on women activists and, eventually, their feminist positioning. Hence, this exploration addresses my

researcher/activist location and my own complex identity shaped by western feminist thought.

In fact, it was my feminist location, informed by this western feminist thought, that led me to question the feminist positioning of the Ethiopian women activists. Observations and discussions with some of the activists working with me at EWLA and at other women's organizations revealed that most of them were either reluctant to admit a feminist positioning or categorically rejected a "feminist" labelling of their activities. Hence, it was challenging for me to understand their activism from a western feminist perspective. That led me to question whether and how feminist consciousness has emerged among the Ethiopian women activists. Taking into account their hostile position to what purports to be or is linked to feminism, I decided to focus on the types of their activism and uncover any connections of their activism to feminism.

Research questions

The primary objective of the study is to understand how women become activists, experience activism and trace the emergence of their feminist consciousness. My argument is that Ethiopian women have been and continue to be engaged in different types of activism during the last 60 years, Moreover, their activism is most often contingent on the political context in which they live. Based on this assumption, and through the life story narratives of women activists, this research examines the different types of women's activism and subsequently the different types of feminism. Hence, this study is guided by the three connected research questions:

1. What are the different types of activism that women activists have been engaged in during the last three political regimes**?**
2. What are the different types of feminism, if any?
3. Do the types of women's activism in Ethiopia align with pre-existing typologies of feminism, and if so, how?

This is complemented by three secondary questions, which were inherent in the interview schedule and contributed to the women constructing and revealing their life story narratives:

1. How do they define, reconstruct and give meaning to their individual or collective experience of activism?
2. To what major social, economic and political circumstances/events do they relate their activist engagement?
3. To what extent do women activists think of themselves as feminists?

The data I collected and the analysis of how women activists reconstruct and give meaning to their experiences allowed me to explore not only how their feminist consciousness emerges but also its characteristics. Hence, I was able to unravel what could be characterized as “Ethiopian feminism”. Nevertheless, this became possible only once I made a paradigm shift. In other words, I had to change the way I think, understand and analyse the narratives, which is shaped by my western feminist perspective, to one informed by the reality of the Ethiopian women activists’ experience. I had to constantly question what in my thinking was informed by my western feminist conceptions and refer back to my data and the historical background of Ethiopian women’s location in society. This process is in agreement with Dillard’s (2000: 662) “endarkened feminist epistemology” based on the “historical roots of black feminist thought”, and hence in this case informed by Ethiopian women’s historical grounding. In using this approach, I have consented to depart from my earlier, somehow “ideological” position and attempt to think about Ethiopian women’s history of struggle from a new angle. This approach allows me to attempt to capture and articulate new readings of feminism. Researchers such as Biseswar (2008), applying a limited and preconceived idea of what feminism is, conclude that there is an absence of feminism among educated Ethiopian women. In this context, attempting to trace feminism in Ethiopian women’s history may be understood as a defensive culturist and essentialist project, to say the least, or as a complete denial of the oppression of women in that country, compelling a researcher such as I to state that this is not my intention (Abye, 2015).

Brief historical background

1. Radicalization of Ethiopian women students and the end of the imperial regime

Scholars seem to agree that 1960 represented the year that the emperor suffered his first serious opposition in the form of an attempted coup d'état planned by two brothers, Mengistu and Garmame Neway, who, according to Bahru (2001: 211), "epitomized the military and intellectual components of that opposition before as well as after 1960". On the other hand, Gebru (2009) identifies the Ethiopian Student Movement as the dominant force of protest between 1960 and1974. The spirit of the time was conducive to protests. Male and female radical students were aware both of the struggles of other Africans for decolonization and of student uprisings in Western Europe and North America. Politically, Gebru (2009: 26) writes, "the radical students saw the penetration of capitalism under the aegis of imperialism as detrimental to the country's development and the welfare of its working people. They also saw it as bolstering absolutism". As a result, it appears, they were more attracted by the Soviet and Chinese socialist models. According to Bahru (2001: 222), "the Ethiopian Student Movement … saw steady radicalization throughout the 1960s and early 1970s". The movement was not merely home-based. It had external organs both in Europe and North America.[4] Leaders of the movement who had access to leftist literature contributed to the radicalization by providing arguments based on Marxist–Leninist ideology. Gebru (2009: 27) explains that, "united by a vision of just society, a total rejection of the existing order … they [radical students] shaped political thought and action, ultimately giving birth to the Ethiopian political left".

Despite the fact that a significant number of female student activists participated in the movement that contributed to the end of the imperial regime, their history is either invisible or unrecorded. In his brief critique of Bahru's (2014) recent book on the student movement, H. Alem (2015: 11) writes that

[4] The Ethiopian Students Union in Europe (ESUE) and the Ethiopian Students Association in North America (ESANA).

> Bahru does not appear to have interviewed any women beside Abebech; of course, there were three women in his Nazareth oral history project. One of them, Zenebework Tadesse, a prominent feminist, is not mentioned anywhere in the book! Yet she is the unacknowledged author of a “forty-six page article” on “the woman question”.

2. The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and the engagement of women

The absence of an organized and prepared political party in the country created a vacuum that led the military to seize political power with relative ease. Writing about the Ethiopian Revolution, Halliday and Molyneux (1981: 87) expose the events that culminated in the appropriation of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution by the military group that seized power, alias the Derg:

> The period from June to September has been called the “creeping coup”; effective power had been appropriated by this new military committee, yet this was not at first evident to outsiders and may not have been clear to the members of the Derg itself … although they initially claimed to want a new constitution that would allow a civilian government to emerge, the Derg gave evidence of a new orientation in mid-August when they seem to have decided they, rather than the civilians, should assume effective and visible political power … the Derg announced that all government power would for the time being be in the hands of the new Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC).

This is what both female and male student movement activists have since identified as the hijacking of their struggle, which pushed them to organize and establish opposition parties that sought for political power to be transferred back to the people. Hence, like many of their male comrades, women activists joined EPRP, Meison (an acronym of the Ethiopian Socialist Movement in Amharic), Abiot or later armed groups such as the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (EPDM), the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), etc., which ultimately led them to participate in the urban and rural armed struggles described by the revolutionary women activists in this study.

The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution certainly brought transformational changes, with the Derg and its allies (composed of some members of the student movement) spending the first two years enacting radical reforms and consolidating their grip on power. Bahru (2001) cites the nationalization of financial institutions and private commercial and industrial enterprises, the

land reform proclamation and the nationalization of urban extra houses as three reforms occurring between January and July 1975 that transformed the Ethiopian political landscape.

Although land reform was long overdue and the proclamation was primarily conceived to respond to the peasants' long struggle for land reform, scholars argue that it was subsequently used to serve both the Derg's need to widen its base through peasants associations and its need for legitimacy. The "Development Through Cooperation" campaign, known as *Edget Behebret Zemecha* and organized by the Derg with the intention of mobilizing the youth under its policy, played a pivotal role in promoting anti-governmental activism by both female and male students. The principal opponent of the Derg, EPRP, which gained its momentum at the apogee of the Revolution, used the campaign as a space for massive recruitment of youth activists. Moreover, the organization had also infiltrated labour organizations and other urban organizations. As Gebru (2009: 39) affirms, the first phase of the Revolution, "a goal achieved with remarkable ease and little bloodshed", ended, giving way to the second phase, which saw "the bloodiest episodes in the country's history". At first, the Red Terror was conducted against members of EPRP and all those presumed to be anti-revolutionaries. As arbitrary killing of any suspected or potential member of EPRP became the rule, the party was forced to go underground and continue the urban armed struggle, not only against the Derg but also against Meison.

Finally, once EPRP was literally neutralized, the "Revolutionary Flame" (in Amharic, *Abyotawi Saddad*) of Mengistu Haile Mariam extended its destructive arms towards its former ally, Meison. During the early days of the Revolution, when EPRP enjoyed legitimacy because it was considered the natural protector of the proletariat, the less popular Meison had strategically allied itself to the Derg, choosing to influence the direction of the Revolution within the structures established by PMAC. In effect, not only had Meison played a key role in the indoctrination of the PMAC leadership with Marxist–Leninist ideology, it had also occupied key positions (Bahru 2001).

Most of the radical women activists who participated in the student movement continued their struggle against the totalitarian military regime that confiscated their revolution, first by joining opposition parties, the urban armed struggle and the various liberation movements (EPRA,[5] TPLF, etc.). Their aim was consistent with their intention to bring about social change through collective action including armed struggle.

However, once the urban armed struggle failed to achieve its goal, some women activists quietly advanced progressive agendas within movement abeyance structures, while others joined the rural armed struggle. A few were recruited to join the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA), a mass organization initiated and established by the military government to organize women at different levels of state structures.

3. The fall of the military regime and the emergence of a new form of women's activism

Organized under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF),[6] the party successfully took power in 1991 after 17 years of war against the military regime (Alem 2008: 71). Hence, once the Derg was overthrown, EPRDF formed a transitional government until the formation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in 1995. Seizing the opportunity provided by the victory of liberation fronts over the dictatorship, women organized in either small grassroots/local organizations or professional associations to challenge the oppressive institutions and structures and advocate their equality at all levels of society.

Thus, after 1991, the first feature that characterized this period and set the tone with regard to gender issues was the promulgation and launch of the National Women's Policy in 1993. That was followed by a successful series of reforms that occurred within the legal arena. Here is what Mahdere Paulos, former executive director of EWLA, said in a conference organized by the Indian Embassy, at Addis Ababa University (AAU):

[5] The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army (EPRA) is the armed branch of EPRP.

[6] EPRDF is composed of the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

> The policy facilitated the incorporation of women's issues in the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It states gender mainstreaming and affirmative measures to be included at all levels of government structure. It was under this policy that the first national machinery for gender equality was established in the form of a department of women's affairs in all government ministries and organizations. (Mahdere 2006: 12)

This was followed by the ratification of the 1994 Constitution with the provision of Article 35, which included nine distinct measures on the rights of women. Among other rights the article granted women equal rights with men in the fields of social, economic and political life. Moreover, it also ensured women's entitlement to affirmative action policies conceived to redress the "historical legacy of inequality and discrimination" they had endured for centuries. The second major legal reform concerns the revision of the 1960 Civil Code; the Revised Family Law of 2000 rectified some of the discriminatory articles considered as prejudicial to women, such as articles 635, 637 and 641, which established the husband as the head of the house in charge of the interests of the family. Article 641,[7] which was particularly contested by W/ro[8] Senedu Gebru, provided the husband with the right to choose the place of residence; it had been discussed and voted on by a parliament mainly made up of men. The 2000 Revised Family Law finally changed all these laws that were discriminatory against women, granting (married) women the equality they deserved in the management of their family and common property. The marriageable age for girls was raised from

[7] Fitawrari Zewde Otero, former parliamentarian and colleague of W/ro Senedu Gebru, said in a video produced to honour her lifetime accomplishment, "When the civil law was presented to the parliament, there was an article that states only husbands can choose where the couple's place of residence should be. She was not happy with this article and opposed it. She commented there is no ground to make this a solitary decision and that it should be a mutual decision as a married couple, but as the majority of the members were men no one responded to her comment. She was taken aback by this and said 'I may be the only woman representative today and you can ignore my comments but there will be a time when more women are in parliament and this law will be in place'. Now her prediction has come true, there are many women in parliament today. This quality about her impressed me the most. In all her engagement she was an active parliamentarian. I admired her courage so much that I named my daughter Senedu. She was the most remarkable person; she was a true Ethiopian, very patriotic about her country, always put her country and her people first" (Terusew 2015, *The courageous life of Senedu Gebru*, Impala Communication).

[8] "W/ro" is a shortened version of "Weyzero" and indicates that a woman is married, similar to the English title "Mrs". However, it is also a sign of distinction or a title indicating the higher status of a woman, similar to "Lady" in the English language.

15 to 18 years of age, which is also the marriageable age for young male adults.

Finally, the third law to be revised during this period is the Penal Law of 1949. The Revised Penal Law of 2005 “has addressed issues related to sexual and physical violence against women by raising the penalty” (Mahdere 2006: 14). Not only has the new law emphasized the criminal aspects of socially accepted practices such as domestic violence, abduction and rape, but it has also criminalized other harmful traditional practices (HTPs) such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage, affecting the life and health of many girls in many parts of the country. “If the practice of these acts is medically proved to cause serious injury to body, mind or health, it will be punishable,” Mahdere (2006: 14) concludes. There seem to be a consensus that priority should be given to legal reforms for social justice. Nonetheless, despite all the measures taken by governments in order to remediate the gender imbalance in society (that is, major successes in the legal and policy arenas, with constitutional provisions and recent changes in family and criminal law in favour of women’s individual rights), oppressive practices still challenge women’s progress towards equality today.

Currently, though, similar to the case of the pioneers’ era and of other feminist movements around the world, the momentum for the development of the Ethiopian women’s movement seems to have slowed down. This is highlighted by the passage of regressive laws such as the Proclamation of Charities and Societies in 2009**,** contested by most of the activists in this study. This proclamation, most often referred to as the new non-governmental organization (NGO) law in the narratives, defines three types of NGOs: international, Ethiopian resident and local/Ethiopian NGOs. It also limits advocacy work on human rights issues to local/Ethiopian NGOs. The main issue is that, while international and resident NGOs can work on issues related to development and have access to unlimited international funding, local/Ethiopian NGOs depend more on local funding and only 10% of their income is permitted to derive from foreign funding. Thus, it appears that

Ethiopian women's activism is presently going through a backlash, which has usually been the case in the history of feminist movements.

Rationale behind the typologies of Ethiopian women activists

During the last 60 years, Ethiopia has known various political systems, ranging from an imperial monarchy to a socialist/military dictatorship, to a state with a claim to developmental democracy. Hence, throughout these periods, Ethiopian women activists have resorted to various forms of activism. The question of women's emancipation and women's role in social transformation has been articulated and treated differently by women whom I have classified as pioneers, revolutionaries and negotiators. The proposed classification of Ethiopian women activists as pioneers, revolutionaries and negotiators draws on Weber's method of "ideal types" as an analytical tool.

The pioneers

Emperor Haile Selassie's regime lasted from 1930 to 1974. Most historians have defined two periods of his reign: before the Italian invasion of 1936, and after the liberation of 1941 until the end of his reign in 1974. However, for the purpose of this research, I will focus on a specific time within his reign: the period after the Revised Constitution of 1955, in which the emperor "granted" women full citizenship.

This period – the last 19 years of Emperor Haile Selassie's regime, 1955 to 1974 – is marked by the dominance of women's activism organized within charitable women's associations that focused on the socio-economic challenges faced by less privileged women and children. Their goal was to promote and work towards social justice without questioning and/or destabilizing the system in place. Nonetheless, as Alem (2008: 137) affirms, "they still had little or no impact on government policies, laws, regulations or development programmes". Consequently, Haile Selassie's imperial period seemed more open to what could be classified as social activism. This mostly involved elite women participating on a voluntary basis to alleviate the socio-economic conditions of poor women.

Although this could be questioned, for the purpose of this study, and similar to some other scholars,[9] I will continue to classify this group as the pioneers. The pioneers were born before the Italian invasion of 1936. In most cases, they belonged to the elite group of the period, and some received some form of western education and were members of the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association (EWWA) when it was first established in 1935. It eventually became the first women's organization to help in the war effort against the Italian invasion the following year. Some of its members – W/ro Senedu Gebru and W/ro Shewa Regged, whom we will mention in the chapter on pioneers (chapter four) – had served in the resistance movement. Hence, the pioneers include the emancipated women of this period, who were organized around and engaged in the improvement of the social, political and economic status of Ethiopian women. They became role models for their successors**,** as featured in Rita Pankhurst's (1991: 71) work *Senedu Gebru: a role model for Ethiopian women*, which describes Senedu as being among those who "have made their presence felt" and "a woman who has made a mark on her society … and above all has changed the course of other women's lives".

The revolutionaries

The last decade of the monarchy (1965–1974) was marked by more radical/revolutionary ideals that led female and male students, young adults, and other demographic groups to demand structural or institutional changes. Several movements – including the Ethiopian Student Movement, consisting of university and high school students – were formed based on class consciousness and particularly focused on dismantling the feudal system by restoring land to the tillers (Bahru 2001; Alem 2008; Gebru 2009). This hectic transitional period led to the Revolution of 1974, and it was followed by a

[9] I attended the Gender Forum organized by the Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF) that took place on 28th October 2009 at Ghion Hotel (Saba Hall) from 4.30 pm to 6.30 pm. During the seminar, two scholars presented their papers on the topic of "A brief survey of the Ethiopian women's movement". Associate Professor Zerihun Asfaw, from AAU, listed all the associations that had existed since 1927 and divided the movements into three eras: 1) Era of Pioneers, before 1935, focusing on the themes of patriotism and education, 2) Era of Educated Women of the 1960s and 1970s, whom he defined as voice of women and high achievers, and 3) Contemporary Era – the period of associations (EWLA, EMWA, NEWA, etc.), which we will encounter in the following chapters.

socialist dictatorship that lasted from 1974 to 1991 and was marked by the Red Terror (1976–1978).

Moreover, although the emancipation of women and their place in society was raised as a topic for debate within Haile Selassie I University (Pankhurst, S. 1957), since renamed Addis Ababa University, the issue was not listed as a priority on the student movement's agenda (Alem 2008). Gender as an issue was put onto the political agenda after the 1974 Revolution (Almaz 1991). This led to the establishment of a mass women's association: REWA. Thus, of the activists spared from the Red Terror, prison or exile, some decided to work within the system, and others continued to resist dictatorship by covertly supporting or joining various liberation movements.

The women activists of this period are thus classified as the revolutionaries. The revolutionaries include, therefore, the post-war generation of women, the educated women activists who participated in the student movement and engaged in struggle against the totalitarian military regime by joining opposition parties, the urban armed struggle that followed and, finally, the different liberation movements; or, by contrast, women activists who supported or joined the revolutionary movement of the Derg. Subsequently, revolutionaries from rural areas and more modest backgrounds completed this group. While the majority of this young generation of revolutionaries joined EPRP, others chose the different liberation fronts that opposed the Derg. The revolutionaries thus include the group of women who went through the "radicalization process" of the student movement and joined and actively participated in any of the revolutionary parties and/or rebel armed groups, and the younger generation of rural women who joined rebel groups. Their aim is consistent with their action: to bring about social change through collective action if possible or armed struggle if necessary.

The negotiators

Finally, 1991 brought a new transitional government to power, after the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Force (EPDRF) succeeded in defeating the totalitarian regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam. Accordingly,

mass organizations like REWA were dissolved, giving way to smaller women-centred grassroots organizations as well as the donor-driven national machinery, for example women's affairs bureaux, at all levels of government structure. Consequently, in the early 1990s, the different groups of Ethiopian women activists seized the political opportunity that the victory of the liberation fronts created, strategically joining forces to cooperate and coexist. They focused their attention on gender equality in the political, economic and social arenas.

Until 2005, the present regime tended to encourage women's grassroots activism, consequently leading to the proliferation of women's associations that promote women's equality in terms of their economic, social and legal rights. The political environment was, some would argue,[10] conducive to change. NGOs became organizations of the type in which women activists advocated and worked for social change. Therefore, while some activists focused on rights-based approaches, working on policy and legal reforms, others emphasized development projects, opting for women's economic empowerment. These women are classified as the negotiators.

The negotiators involve, therefore, women activists from different generations and different backgrounds who are organized and committed to advancing social justice in general and gender equality in particular. The negotiators include women from diverse categories. Professional/working women born and raised during the emperor's era, who somehow avoided or escaped from the revolutionary movement, became activists by establishing or actively collaborating with various NGOs concerned with gender issues. Negotiators are also former revolutionary activists who have found new forms of engagement and continue their activism within these new settings. And finally, the negotiators include those who were born and raised during the Derg period and who joined the workforce or entered high school/higher education during the present regime. Hence, the negotiators combine both

[10] At the 10th anniversary of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), celebrated in 2006, both Meaza Ashenafi, founding executive director of EWLA (1995–2004), and Mahdere Paulos, executive director of EWLA (2006–2009), did acknowledge in their respective speeches a fairly conducive political environment with regard to the legal reforms that occurred between 2000 and 2005 (Personal note, 2006).

mature women and young women who seem *a priori* focused on advancing the gender agenda. They are the very subjects of our study. To what extent does their activism align with pre-existing typologies of feminism?

Organization of the dissertation

The dissertation, which is composed of eight chapters, aims to understand how women become activists and experience activism. Thus, chapter two presents the literature review, which explores the literature on both activism and feminism. The various studies of McAdam (1986, 1989) and McAdam and Paulsen (1993) that emerged from the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project[11] seem to provide conceptual overviews relevant to this study. Although the Freedom Summer studies were conducted in a post-industrial and affluent society, concepts such as high-risk/cost – as opposed to low-risk/cost – activism demonstrate the existence of different kinds of activism available to potential activists. Therefore, chapter two provides the concepts that offer a framework for research that aims to study both the path and the journey to activism of the Ethiopian women who started their activist life during the 1960s.

Meanwhile, other political/social conditions call for other strategies. In other words, during the military regime, some activists opted to continue their struggle discreetly within the system. Were they holding the women's movement "in abeyance"[12] (Taylor 1989), as a strategy to survive the military dictatorship? What about the period after the overthrow of the military dictatorship? After 17 years of armed struggle, women fighters (like men fighters) have joined the civilian world. What have they become? It is clear that some have gone back to normal life (getting married, starting a family and joining (or not) the public sphere – which is by itself another topic for research), while others have continued their activism in different ways. In this

[11] The 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project was a campaign that "brought hundreds of primarily white, northern college students to Mississippi for all, or part of, the summer of 1964 to help staff 'Freedom Schools' and register black voters". This project is particularly remembered for the kidnapping and killing of three freedom volunteers by "a group of segregationists led by Mississippi law enforcement officers" (McAdam and Paulsen 1993: 648).

[12] A concept borrowed from Taylor's (1989) article, suggesting a more discreet form of activism when it occurs in a political/social environment wary of change.

case, we can refer to what Crossley (2003) and McNay (2010) define as “radical habitus” to explain agents’ consciousness of their social conditions/environment as well as their reflexive disposition to act and bring about social change.

This study also draws on feminist conceptual frameworks by looking at the various schools of feminist thought, different feminist theories in relation to race/ethnicity and those influenced by postmodern and post-structuralist perspectives. While feminist explanations from what has been described as Third World feminism are relevant to the exploration of Ethiopian women’s feminist dispositions, the literature on women’s activism in different contexts complements the study by offering gender perspectives. Recent Ethiopian literature on women’s participation in the social, political and economic arenas (Eshetu 2005; Alem 2008; Biseswar 2008, 2011) has also contributed to setting the context of gender activism in Ethiopia.

Chapter three provides the rationale behind the methodological choice of the life story narrative, as well as the sampling criteria, data collection and analysis methods. This research proposes that life story narratives are used to grasp the complex realities perceived by the interviewees. This implies the search for meaning, analysis and interpretation of data based on language or words. Chapter four is connected to chapter three as it presents the 19 women activists who participated in this research. Hence, the chapter is organized according to the different types of activists: the revolutionaries and the negotiators. Through the use of selected extracts, this chapter introduces the interviewees and offers the first indication of their activist identities and principles and the causes they defend.

The following three chapters draw on the different typologies of the women activists. The pioneers comprise the women activists organized and engaged in what could be classified as western-inspired welfare or charitable organizations. They were committed to the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of underprivileged women of the emperor’s era. Moreover, they promoted the access of women to the public sphere by advocating equal access of women to higher education and employment.

Hence, through the analysis of the literature review, chapter five explores the type of their activism and highlights how their activism is informed by feminist principles that emanate from somewhat "liberal" feminism.

The revolutionaries consist of women activists supporting or belonging to the different revolutionary groups or parties. The revolutionaries are composed of women activists who joined revolutionary movements, parties and/or rebel armed fronts according to their principles during the different phases of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and the Derg's subsequent dictatorship. Their goal was to bring about social change through structural change. Included in chapter six are the life story narratives of four such women activists. The use of ideal type was crucial to determining the inclusion criteria. The selected life story narratives describe and explore what types of activism and what types of feminism, if any, were dominant during this period. Hence, this chapter consists of longer extracts[13] of the selected women's life story narratives that examine their worldview and the awakening of their (feminist) consciousness, and/or paths to activism, as well as what they think and how they define their activism.

The negotiators comprise the various activists of today. In fact, they can be seen as the linking bridge to the next generation, who could perhaps be identified as the "successors" in future research. Thus, professional or working women with experience seem, in line with the pioneer type of activism, to have kept the "movement in abeyance" during the stable years of the Derg regime. After the overthrow of the Derg, they reinvented a new type of activism within a framework of philanthropic activism, either individually or in small, organized structures. The early involvement in political activism of those classified as revolutionaries seems to have contributed to their awareness of women's location in patriarchal society, consequently giving them, in their later life, the opportunity to focus on gender by founding or joining organizations in the NGO sector. Similar to chapter six, chapter seven consists of long extracts[14] from four different narratives, in this case tracing

[13] See Appendix B

[14] See Appendix C

the negotiators' paths to activism and exposing their convictions and the various causes they defend. Eventually, it uncovers their feminist activism.

In chapter eight, analysis and interpretation is offered in light of the literature review. The chapter therefore discusses the different type of activisms as well as the type(s) of feminism(s) that emerge from the narratives. The discussion reveals feminist convictions rooted in the Ethiopian historical, political and cultural context and informed by the multiple and complex identities of Ethiopian women and their lived experience. The conclusion sums up all my findings and discussions, and attempts to identify new directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

In order to understand Ethiopian women's activism from a feminist perspective and explore whether and how a feminist consciousness emerges from their narratives, this chapter draws on the literature on both activism and feminism. Therefore, after a brief definition of activism from a feminist perspective, the first section explores different theoretical explanations of activism. This is followed by the examination of various feminist discourses on the oppression of women/resistance. The last section provides a review of the literature examining women's activism in different contexts.

Defining activism from a feminist perspective

Feminist researchers define activism in various ways. Datar (1995: 229) exposes previous researchers' use of "the same criteria as those used for men, such as actions in the street, speeches at rallies, fighting court battles, negotiations with employers" to assess the special experiences of women workers organizing in India. In Black feminist thought, Collins (2000: 33) locates the embedded character of African American women's activism within the dialectics of oppression and activism (resistance) fostered by intersecting oppressions of race, class and gender. The author adds that African American women's collective experiences of these intersecting oppressions serve as a stimulus to their development of a "self-defined Black women's standpoint that in turn fosters Black women's activism".

Siriphant (1996: 3) gives a wider and more open definition, which "encompasses overt and covert forms of political action and opposition… from most visible forms of public protest and community organizing to less visible but equally engaged [forms]… such as writing, education for consciousness raising, performance art to name a few". When linking activism to the interests of women and knowledge production, Gouws (2005: 43) describes universities as a site of struggle and says "gender and women's studies were viewed as the academic arm of the women's movement". She concludes that the relationship between academics and the

activist movement has resulted in the institutionalization of gender studies and women's studies in higher education (p. 44). Pereira (2005: 3) pushes the idea further when she writes that her "aim is to begin a process of relating intellectual content in gender and women's studies to its political agenda, with the view of outlining potential trajectories for the future". Dillard (2000) addresses the question of research in the academy "as a responsibility" that is answerable and obligated to the very persons and communities engaged in the enquiry.

I. General theoretical literature on activism

The aim of the following section is to explore what we know about how individuals become activists. Examination of the literature on activism reveals both the existence of different approaches to explaining political action and the evolution of the focus of research exploring the phenomena of political action. Although the rich available literature on activism and the multiplicity of approaches to activism provide the researcher with choices that allow her/him to explore the issue from different angles, it can also be the source of a dilemma as it is difficult to address all the information on the issue within a single study. Therefore, one has to choose those most relevant to the study in question.

The purpose of this study is to trace and explore the different journeys of Ethiopian women activists through three consecutive and yet contrasting political contexts. One difficulty encountered when one tries to explore the literature on the concept is that there are many theories that purport to explain the different aspects of activism. Both individual activism and collective action are somehow interconnected, as they are parts of the whole, and are thus both included in the social movement literature. For example, one of the topics addressed in the social movement literature is "differential recruitment", which concerns the reasons why some individuals decide to become activists while others remain inactive. While some researchers answer this question based on the individual characteristics of movement activists, others consider those irrelevant and opt for structural availability as the facilitating factor for individual participation.

Consequently, different sociological schools of thought on social movements, predominantly from affluent societies, have tried to explain activism in these societies (McCarthy & Zald 1973; Tilly 1979; McAdam 1986, 1989). Escobar (1992) draws on this literature when he refers to two schools of thought: the first is described as Anglo-Saxon, oriented towards and focusing on organization, strategy, interests, resources and conflict, making it part of what is called the resource mobilization paradigm. The second school of thought focuses on identity, emphasizing the social actors and collective action who struggle to constitute new identities and autonomous action. Escobar asserts that Latin American countries primarily practise the latter and are criticized for disregarding the resource mobilization paradigm. However, he writes that most scholars conclude that both should be considered for a more effective movement. Crossley (2003), on the other hand, reveals his reservations regarding the use of the resource mobilization paradigm to explore individual agents or collective action as it focuses primarily on structures and economic factors while disregarding the effects of what Bourdieu (1989) has defined as symbolic capital, which was later completed by cultural capital.

1. McAdam: micro-structural and attitudinal accounts of activism

In his article, McAdam (1986: 65) exposes how much has been written by psychologists whose focus has been on the individual's motivational accounts of recruitment. He writes, "attitudinal and grievances models of activism locate the motive of participation in the movement within the individual actor". Theories that place the motive of participation in individual actors base some of their explanations on individual characteristics that contribute to their involvement in political action or make them susceptible to recruitment appeals. McAdam cites among these characteristics "strong attitudinal affinity with the goal of a movement or well-articulated grievances consistent with the movement's ideology" (p. 65).

Structuralists such as Tilly (1979), Tarrow (1998) or Tilly and Tarrow (1995) have contributed extensively to the literature on collective action and proposed resource mobilization and political process perspectives that emphasize structural disposition as more important than attitudinal affinity

with a cause. One of the reasons given for this is that recruitment cannot occur in the absence of a recruiting agent. However, McAdam and Paulsen (1993: 643) argues that "both [psychological and attitudinal accounts] remain important insofar as they demarcate "the latitude of rejection" (as cited in Petty and Cacioppo 1981) within which individuals are unlikely to get involved in a movement".

McAdam (1986) raises a number of important issues related to activism and participation in social movements. He explains that movements do not have boundaries and thus it is difficult to define who is active or non-active. In order to understand how individuals become activists, he suggests shifting the focus of the study of movements to bounded forms of activism such as specific demonstrations, campaigns, etc. He also highlights the role of the recruiting agent in the recruitment process and asserts that the assumptions of most previous studies are based on a singular recruitment factor as opposed to a diversity of factors involved in the recruitment process. Moreover, McAdam criticizes previous studies of movement recruitment processes as having focused solely on "safe" activism. He argues that there is a distinction between the high-risk/cost and low-risk/cost forms of activism.[15] He identifies two tendencies in explaining low-risk/cost activism. First, he observes that the attitudinal model is important only when individuals are placed in the "latitude of rejection". Second, there are always a large number of recruits. Hence, "the latitude of acceptance" is greater than the number of people who actually participate in any given movement/action: "Empirically the factor that has been consistently shown to bear the strongest relationship to low-risk/cost activism is that of prior contact with a recruiting agent" (McAdam 1986: 68).

McAdam (1986: 67) concludes, "a plausible case could be made that the mix of structural and attitudinal factors that encourage high-risk/cost activism differs from that characteristic of low-risk/cost activism". In order to understand and explore how individuals become engaged in high-risk/cost

[15] McAdam makes a distinction between high-risk/cost and low-risk/cost activisms. While cost refers to the resources that the individual invests in terms of time, energy and money; risk refers to the danger that any engagement, action or intervention may pose to the activist.

activism**,** McAdam proposed a model of recruitment to high-risk/cost activism. As opposed to low-risk/cost activists, high-risk participants' strong attitudinal and personal attachment to a movement serve as a prerequisite for their later involvement (p. 74). In other words, "playing at being 'an activist' is a prerequisite of becoming one" (p. 69).

Moreover, the model emphasizes the importance of four factors in the recruitment process: attitudinal affinity, integration into activist networks, a prior history of activism, and the absence of personal constraints on participation. Thus the author concludes that

> The suggestion is that neither a strictly structural nor an individual motivational model can account for participation in this or any other high-risk/cost activism. An intense ideological identification with the values of the campaign acts to "push" the individual in the direction of participation while a prior history of activism and integration into support networks acts as the structural "pull" that encourages the individual to make good on his strongly held beliefs. (McAdam 1986: 87–88)

In a subsequent study, McAdam and Paulsen (1993) add to our knowledge about the relationship between social ties and participation in a movement. They assert that, while the literature on social movements shows that social ties and prior contact with a movement's participants are strong predictors in the recruitment process of activism, they observe several areas of imprecision, including the lack of theory to explain the observed effects of social ties. Using data from the project as well as additional data obtained from the participants and the no-shows of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, McAdam and Paulsen (1993) found that there are two micro-structural factors linked to individual activism: interpersonal ties (knowing someone involved in a movement is the strongest predictor for recruitment) and membership in the organization. They affirm that there is a relationship between these two factors. The authors give two explanations for the relationship. First, membership in an organization is seen as an extension of interpersonal ties. Second, contact with others in an organizational setting increases the likelihood of being pulled into the movement. However, McAdam and Paulsen's (1993: 645) study suggests two limiting presumptions regarding the effect of social ties on movement

participation/activism: lack of acknowledgement of the various dimensions of social ties, and its consequent impact, which is the failure to acknowledge the “multiple embedding that characterizes people’s lives”.

While previous empirical studies on micro-structural accounts are mainly based on the presence or absence of prior contact with a movement in the recruitment process, McAdam and Paulsen’s (1993) claim is based on the assumption that all of us are embedded in many relationships. The question they pose is why prior contact is given causal primacy when our decision to participate or not could be influenced by other aspects of our relationships. McAdam and Paulsen conclude that

> prior ties would appear to encourage activism only when they (a) reinforce the potential recruit's identification with a particular identity and (b) help to establish a strong linkage between that identity and the movement in question. When these processes of identity amplification and identity/movement linkage take place, activism is likely to follow. In the absence of these processes, prior ties do not appear to be predictive of participation. Movement analysts, then, need to be as attuned to the content of network processes as to the structures themselves. (1993: 663)

Finally, McAdam (1989) discusses the political and personal consequences of movement participation. The psychological/attitudinal and the social-structural perspectives have informed research enquiries focused on the origin of social movements and/or the process of recruitment to action of the individual. When highlighting the commonality between these two perspectives, McAdam argues that both focus on the early stages of collective action. Despite the flourishing generalized account of the personal and political consequences of movement participation in the media, there is a lack of empirical studies on the later stages of activism. He suggests this generalized account is meant to reassure the public by providing a depoliticized function of activists’ futures.

Two important concepts come out of this study: conversion and alteration. When defining conversion and alteration, McAdam (1989: 746) specifies that

> The critical difference between these two concepts centres on the degree to which this is associated with a turning point in a person’s life

> with enduring implications for the individual's future. That does not mean that alteration is a less significant social process.

Both conversion and alteration can occur in two types of groups: groups that are high-risk/cost organized and closed, and those that are organized and yet low-risk/cost. The former demand the exclusive loyalty of their members while maintaining a hostile stance towards the mainstream. Their members are more likely to be revolutionaries looking at bringing about drastic change, which consequently engages its members in the process of conversion rather than the process of alteration. On the other hand, the latter groups are inclusive, tolerant of other attachments of their members. Hence, their members can easily be identified as reformists in whom characteristics conducive to alteration are more likely to occur rather than conducive to conversion.

> Theoretically, the results reported here provide a firm basis for two principal conclusions. Activism, at least of the duration and intensity of Freedom Summer, does indeed have the potential to trigger a process of alteration that can affect many aspects of the participants' lives. Secondly, the consequences of this process may be lifelong or at least long-term … The summer left them attitudinally more disposed and structurally more available for subsequent activism. For many, New Left politics became the organizing principle of their lives, personal as well as political. (McAdam 1989: 746–747)

A study in women's activism has also come to a similar conclusion. The study by Stewart, Settles and Winter (1998) of activists in the 1960s proposes a connection between early life and midlife political action of activists, engaged observers and non-participants. The assumption is that there is a relationship between early activism within the different social movements of the 1960s (the civil rights movement and the women's movement, on the one hand, and the anti-war movements and students protests about university policies on the other) and later-life participation. Moreover, student activism in the major movements has a long-lasting effect on the personal life of the participants.

To sum up, the above-mentioned studies show a global picture of how an individual becomes an activist through the combination of motivational and structural processes that facilitate the recruitment process. McAdam and

Paulsen (1993) confirm the significant role of social ties in the recruitment process when taken as the medium that facilitates the process of identity amplification and identity/movement linkage, conditions that encourage individuals to become activists. In some cases, individuals decide to remain activists through the alteration process and, in extreme cases, through the conversion process. Therefore, some individuals who opt for low-risk/cost activism favour bringing about social change through reforms. However, those opting for high-risk/cost activism may have the same goal, that of bringing about structural change, but differ in their respective strategies: acting within the system as opposed to struggling for a revolution – in other words, those McAdam (1989) identifies as more receptive to the alteration or conversion process respectively. But more importantly, what makes McAdam's (1986) work relevant to this study is that, while he recognizes the significance of and bases his studies on the structuralist account of activism, he also draws on the characteristics of the individual's attitudinal disposition that bring out the acting agent. Recently, more studies (Crossley 2003; McNay 2004; Kennelly 2009) have drawn on Bourdieu's phenomenological account of social space that explores concepts such as the habitus to explain the interactions of social agents within the social space.

2. Bourdieu: the phenomenology of social space

Bourdieu (1989: 14) places his work within the structuralist constructivist paradigm. He draws on the structuralist perspective that implies the existence of "objective structures independent of the consciousness and the will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practice or their representation". He also draws on the constructivist perspective that recognizes the social world as having two dimensions: one that explains the social world through the scheme of perception, thought and action, which Bourdieu argues is constructive of habitus, and that of the social structures or the field in which groups interact – social class.

In this text, Bourdieu (1989) argues for the shift from social physics to social phenomenology. He writes that social science should study both social reality and agents' perceptions of this reality by virtue of their position in the social space. He argues that spontaneous sociology/folk theories or scientific

theories including sociology are part of social reality and as such can acquire the power of construction: “The objectivist break with pre-notion, ideologies, spontaneous sociology or folk theory is inevitable and necessary” (Bourdieu 1989: 18). He recommends social scientists to proceed in two stages: first, use the objectivists’ perspective on social reality, and then reintroduce what has been excluded in order to construct objective reality – that is, reintroducing the sociology of perception. Hence, in order to be credible sociology should not be based solely on subjectivist vision but, rather, needs to construct an objective reality that could be completed by the sociology of perception, for the study of perception implies constructions of different visions of the world which themselves contribute to the construction of the world. “No doubt agents have an active apprehension of the world, no doubt agents do construct their vision of their world. But this is carried out under structural constraints” (p. 18); in other words, it seems that individuals, although limited by structural constraints, still have some space to act and bring about social change.

One important concept that Bourdieu introduces and provides agents with to construct their vision of the world is the habitus. Bourdieu defines habitus as

> both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practice. And in both these dimensions, its operation expresses the social position in which it was elaborated. Consequently, habitus produces practice and representations that are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated; however, they are immediately perceived as such only by those agents who possess the codes, the classificatory schemes necessary to understand their meaning. (1989: 19)

Hence, the study of habitus as a system shows that agents are able to appeal to objective reality through their ability of perception and through their ability of classification. Bourdieu specifies two factors that have an influence upon the agent. On the one hand, he identifies the principal cause of variation in perception as the agent’s position in the social space. On the other hand, he argues that the social world, too, could be subjected to variation – that is, it could be constructed in different ways, according to different divisions or types of capital such as economic, social, ethnic, religious, etc. While economic and social factors have the greatest power to

determine an agent's position in the social world, they can be overpowered by the other factors. "Despite this potential plurality of structuring … it [social space] remains … highly structured reality" (Bourdieu 1989: 19); the question is how agents manage to act and bring out social change in this highly structured social world.

Crossley (2003) proposes understanding social movement through Bourdieu's theory of practice and suggests the possibility of theorizing individual activism and/or group social protest in terms of "radical habitus". He explores social movement theories proposed by Tilly (1979), Jenkins (1983) and Tarrow (1998) and tries to add to them by referring to the preconditions for political protest as explained by Bourdieu in his theory of practice.

> As social movement scholars have convincingly demonstrated, protest behaviour tends to draw upon a stock of historically and culturally variable "techniques" of protest which agents learn: for example, petitioning, marching, occupation, tunnelling and bomb-making. There is always room for improvisation or "coherent deformation" and we should never underestimate the potential of agents to invent new techniques to add to the stock. *But there is a stock and it shapes protest activity. Protesting presupposes learned activist know-how. It is rooted in habitus***.** (Crossley: 2003: 49) (my emphasis)

One of the assumptions Crossley (2003: 49) bases his study on is Bourdieu's assumption that bounds social movements as "cyclical crises" that emerge periodically and are short-lived. Crossley refutes this, arguing that not only does this presuppose a degree of social harmony interrupted by short-lived cyclical crises, but it also "underestimates the capacity of social agents to reflect upon, criticize and protest against the social structures which disadvantage them in various ways".

In order to reveal the individual effects of protest among others, Crossley (2003) refers to McAdam's (1986) study of the Freedom Summer activists of the 1960s and their disposition to continue their activism for many years after their first participation. He believes that these research findings show that the tendency of activists to continue participating in political protest with regard to a specific or various social or political causes has two outcomes. First, it allows us "to theorize activism in terms of durable dispositions" (Crossley

2003: 51), as opposed to Bourdieu's conception of crises as cyclical occurrences. And second, it shows their disposition to activism as an acquired habitus that they have developed by participating in protest or activism, which in turn contributes to perpetuating activism. In this way, the habitus developed through practice contributes "to the perpetuation of activism as a social practice; the activist habitus is thus a structuring structure, or rather, as Bourdieu says of the habitus more generally, a structured and structuring structure" (p. 51).

Crossley (2003) adds that a number of empirical studies demonstrate that exposure to or entrance into activism does not occur randomly but, rather, is a result of reproduction or is acquired within the family or the higher education system. Research findings on the new social movements, feminists and environmental or pacifist movements also show the over-representation of the middle class in the leadership of these new movements. The author argues that both these points lead us to an understanding of activism/participation in political action informed by "radical habitus" developed through practice to continue the practice of activism: "The formation of a radical habitus is closely bound up with an individual's biography but their biography is, in turn, intertwined with and affected by their social-structural location, as well as broader historical trends and events" (p. 51).

"Becoming a social agent entails acquisition of a reflexive disposition" (Crossley 2003: 55): what Crossley is suggesting here is that becoming an activist entails the activist's conscious decision to change certain habits through systematic interrogation and analysis of everyday life. Hence, he argues that activism can be viewed as the interplay of habit and reflexivity that the activist works on to bring change within himself/herself, which has a predisposing effect towards a more global action of bringing about social transformation.

He criticizes the resource mobilization model in social movement theory by deconstructing it and revealing the various elements of which it is constituted. In so doing, he is able to identify how Bourdieu's analytical tools

differ and can be used to understand the different mechanisms of activism. He points out that resource mobilization's focus on mainly economic resources and to some degree on social capital ignores or diminishes symbolic and cultural capital as factors that play a role in protest mobilization. He believes that the use of radical habitus can remediate this deficiency.

Similar to Crossley (2003), some other scholars, including some feminists, have also turned to Bourdieu's work on the phenomenology of social space in which habitus is used to explain individual action/agency. "Retheorizing habitus", McNay (2004: 184) writes that she draws on Bourdieu's "definition of his social phenomenology as relational" to develop an understanding of gender as a lived social relation. In this article she presents agency as a mediating concept that enables both economic forces and cultural relations to be visible in the daily life experience of agents. Moreover, McNay (2004) explains that Bourdieu's phenomenological analysis of social space, in which the social space coincides with spatial space, which also functions as symbolic space, is composed of fields in which actors act and interact. The actors, who are determined by both the distribution of resources and structural relationship, act between fields. McNay (2004: 184) argues that "action and struggles are motivated by perception and representation, not just abstract social structures and economic forces".

The following section explores the different feminist responses to the oppression of women and illustrates how some feminist perspectives on women's activism/resistance converge with the general theoretical perspective on activism. The discussion draws on what Bourdieu has defined as the phenomenology of social space and more specifically on the role of habitus in political action.

II. Feminist discourse on the oppression of women and activism

As seen above, when defining activism Collins (2000: 25) has assumed the dialectical character of women's activism. According to her, a dialectical relationship linking African American women's oppression and activism means that "the two parties are opposed and opposite". In the following

section I will examine how the question of women's oppression and resistance/activism is explored in the feminist scholarship and how feminists have drawn upon Bourdieu to analyse agency in political action.

Beasley (1999) describes four major feminisms – liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist – and various feminist theories concerning race/ethnicity, as well as those influenced by postmodern and post-structuralist perspectives. It should be noted that these analyses concern "Western class societies" (Hartstock 2004; Jagger 2004). I will discuss briefly some of these schools of thought, including what some have defined as Third World feminism, in order to examine their relevance to Ethiopian women's experience of activism. In the following chapter, I will examine if they do indeed inform the views of Ethiopian women activists and, if so, the degree of their influence.

1. Different schools of feminist thought

Once the women's rights and women's liberation movements were established in the 1960s and 1970s, various groups of feminists tried to examine women's location in society according to their own experience of sexist oppression. For Beasley (1999), liberal and Marxist feminisms are compatible with mainstream social and political thought, as male thinkers such as J.S. Mill and Marx/Engels respectively influenced both currents. Accordingly, for both liberal and Marxist feminists, the term "feminism" places women and gender relations within an existing theory. On the other hand, for some radical feminists, such theories are at the service of patriarchy and must be rejected, while others just assume a distinct agenda in which feminism recognizes women's marginalization and seeks to overcome it. Although liberal feminism remains current and still influences feminist thought, Beasley (1999) indicates that the influence of Marxist feminism has waned, leaving divergent groups of feminists to reformulate and transform the agenda. Conversely, recent studies use similar arguments with regard to radical feminism, which has been redefined and/or reformulated within what is now called cultural feminism.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminists believe that women, as rational individuals, should be granted political equality, liberty and justice irrespective of their sex or other arbitrary characteristics. Their assumption is that women's oppression is rooted in sex discrimination and that their subordination is inscribed in the laws and social attitudes that fail to recognize their individual potential. Liberal feminists assume men's roles to be the norm, and consequently they focus on the full participation of women in the existing political, social and economic arenas by seeking equal opportunity according to the law, for example through equal opportunity, wage equity and sex discrimination clauses in human rights codes. However, the fact that their strategy views oppression as an individual problem and ignores social structures has provoked the critique of other schools of thought, mainly from radical feminists. It is seen as class and race biased as it generally reflects the experience of white middle-class western women, which excludes working-class women and black women.

Radical feminism

While it could be assumed that liberal feminists focus on reforms in the context of mainstream perspectives in the feminist movement, radical feminists opt for a more revolutionary model. For them, women's oppression is the root of all other social hierarchies (race, class). Thus, patriarchy is the main cause of women's oppression because it allows men to control women's sexuality and reproduction, for example in relation to abortion and advances in reproductive perspectives and technology. Radical feminists believe that men and women are essentially *different*: men are aggressive and inherently violent and seek to dominate women, who are more nurturing by nature. Beasley (1999) reports that, in contrast to liberal feminists, whose aim is to reduce attention to bodies and bodily difference, radical feminists regard the body as primarily a critical site of oppression for women. It represents women's difference and as such should be celebrated. In addition, radical feminists are convinced that the state is intrinsically patriarchal; therefore, they tend to focus on the politics of the private sphere – that is, sexuality, motherhood and the body (p. 57). Despite their strictly

essentialist view and gender prioritization, radical feminists have been very active in the struggle to end male violence and the emergence of women's counterculture, for they have been instrumental in the creation of rape crisis centres, feminist bookstores and women's housing co-ops.

Nonetheless, as some feminists such as Taylor and Rupp (1993) reveal, some material feminists[16] have argued that this has led to the de-radicalization or depoliticization of the movement and turned it into a "lifestyle" politics that has precipitated the demise of radical feminism in favour of what is now termed "cultural feminism". However, these authors argue that what material feminists have portrayed as de-radicalization is not in fact the changing of radical feminism in favour of "lifestyle" feminism. It is, rather, the result of the repositioning of radical feminist ideals to keep the women's movement alive after the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that was promoted in the USA by liberal feminists. Another factor has been the "backlash" against feminism vocalized by a rising right-wing conservative women's movement (Faludi 1993).

Marxist feminism

Marxist feminists analyse the individual in the context of production. They argue that the form of production – that is, capitalism – determines the structure of society. In this view, class oppression predates sex oppression. Women's oppression is based on the division of labour rooted in capitalism and thus women are exploited both at work and at home. According to Hartstock (2004: 40), one key assumption that justifies their claim is that

> women's work in every society differs systematically from men … this division of labour is the first and in some societies the only division of labour, and moreover, that it is central to the organization of social labour more generally.

Consequently, similar to liberal feminists, their solutions focus mainly on the participation of women in the labour force. However, contrary to liberal feminists, whose aim is the achievement of equal access to education and employment for women, Marxist feminists' aim is to challenge capitalism

[16] For Fraser (1995, 2007), material feminists' concern focuses on economic inequality and maldistribution while, on the other hand, cultural feminists give more emphasis to identity-based problems and the politics of recognition.

through women's participation in working-class struggles. Critics emphasize how this strategy for change reduces women's oppression to class and reveals the lack of attention to questions of reproduction and sexuality. Moreover, it also reduces racism to an effect of capitalism.

Socialist feminism

Socialist feminism derives, Beasley (1999) argues, from debates between radical and Marxist feminists. Socialist feminists claim that women's oppression is rooted in both patriarchy (men's control of sexuality and reproduction) and capitalism (sexual division of labour, which exploits women workers, especially as oppressed domestic workers). As Jagger (2004: 62) asserts, socialist feminists' aim is to contribute to "a practical reconstruction of the world in which women's interests are not subordinate to men's interest". They also aspire to organizing women workers to demand fair wages and adequate working conditions. However, a point that needs to be made is that we can detect here ambivalence or a certain degree of conviction that tends to justify the cultural belief that women are responsible for the home sphere. Hartstock (2004: 42) raises this issue when she writes about the narrowness of the Marxian analysis of women's production of use-value in the home, which "has also not been well understood by socialists". She criticizes the Marxist perspective, noting that, "Marx too takes for granted women's responsibility for household labour". Many men and women still adhere to this logic, especially working-class people, whose life and economic reality force them to participate in the workforce. Unlike those upper- or middle-class women who denounce what Friedan (2001: 3) has defined as the "problem that has no name" and which confines women to the home, working-class women would probably prefer to have the choice whether to participate in the workforce or be homemakers. African American women would later argue that social feminists fail to explore the interconnections between class, gender and race/ethnicity.

2. Gender, class and race/ethnicity

African American women

For women of African American descent in the USA, their struggle against slavery had given them an insight into the struggle against oppression in

general and racism/sexism in particular. Nineteenth-century black women such as Mary Church Terrell, Sojourner Truth, Anna Cooper, Amanda Berry Smith and others found no contradiction between the struggle for liberation from racial oppression and the participation of black women in the women's rights movement. bell hooks (1981: 4), in *Ain't I a woman: black women and feminism,* cites Sojourner Truth's famous statement:

> there is a great stir about coloured men getting their rights, and not coloured women, and if coloured men get their rights, and coloured women theirs, you see the coloured men will be masters over the women, and it will be just the same.

For Sojourner there was no prioritizing of racism over sexism (hooks: 3). As history tends to repeat itself, African American women activists of the late 1960s and 1970s, such as Angela Davis, Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison and others faced the same dilemma.

Even when black women conceded that they supported some of the goals of the movement (such as equal pay), they hesitated in joining with white women. Their reluctance had deep historical roots, as Toni Morrison suggested in an article written for the *New York Times Magazine* in August 1971: "Too many movements and organizations," she wrote, "have made deliberate overtures to enrol blacks and have ended up rolling on them". According to Morrison, the very "whiteness" of the women's liberation movement engendered a deep sense of mistrust in black women: "They [black women] look at white women and see the enemy – for racism is not confined to white men" (Berkeley 1999: 51).

Therefore, unlike their elder sisters of the previous century, most of the black women activists opted for racial solidarity to end racial domination; others reoriented their aspirations and organized to fight sexist exploitation. Nonetheless, as hooks (2000: 4) argues, the lack of awareness of "white women who dominate feminist discourse … [and] have little or no understanding of white supremacy as a racial politics, the psychological impact of class, of their political status within a racist, sexist, capitalist state" prompted African American feminists to question their positioning within the women's liberation movements. Black feminists insisted on the

interconnectedness of sex, race and class oppression and refused the appropriation of the term “oppression” by white feminists. They maintained, “Blacks are oppressed. Whites are suppressed and there is a difference” (Crawford 1999: 51). They argued that through the use of radical terms like oppression, the hegemonic feminist discourse, rather than revealing the daily experience of the exploited mass of women, masked the fact that it promoted the interest of relatively privileged women (hooks 2000). As Berkeley (1999: 166) concludes, “it was not an intellectual outburst for them; it was real”.

In addition to resistance to race, class and gender oppressions, African American women’s activism is also characterized by the struggle for group survival, which is just as important as the conventional opposition to institutional power (Collins 2000: 217). Consequently, the rejection of liberal solutions that proposed reforms instead of radical/structural change and mistrust of white women and the misrepresentation of black women in the women’s movements led African American women to create their own organizations to deal with their own “double jeopardy: to be black and female” (Beal 1999: 169).

Third World[17] feminism

Third World feminists also developed feminist perspectives, which derived from their own vision of women’s oppression and their critique of western feminisms. In line with African American or Black feminist thought, they emphasized the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression that Third World women face in their everyday lives. For Third World women, gender, ethnic/race discrimination and poverty are factors that play a key role in their oppression. Third World feminists consider that their emancipation derives not only from the struggle against the above-mentioned oppressions but also from the struggle against inequalities among nations, specifically asymmetric relationships between the Global North and Global South (Steady 2006).

[17] The term Third World can be problematic, in that it also derives from a hierarchy embedded in western economics; nonetheless, I will use the term “Third World women” as a description anchored in geographical and political identity.

In her famous article entitled “Under western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses”, Mohanty (2003) takes a critical approach towards western feminist discourse about women in the Third World. The author sheds light on the effects of the creation of a universal image of women in the Third World, specifically in the context of knowledge and scholarship production where, in the process, power is exercised: “This power needs to be defined and named”, argues Mohanty (2003: 235). She denounces some First World feminists’ representation of “the average third world woman” as based on false generalizations (p. 237). The author exposes the idea that in order for educated, liberated, independent First World women to exist, there was the need to create dependent, powerless Third World women. This assumed universal image of women in the Third World as powerless, dependent and illiterate is constructed in comparison to the self-representation of women in the First World, who are assumed to be liberated, independent and educated, if not in reality at least discursively. Therefore, Mohanty explains, just like African American women’s expression of colonization of their experiences by the hegemonic women’s movement, Third World women’s experiences were also colonized by the hegemonic US and Western European feminist discourse.

Mohanty’s (2003) aim is to deconstruct this representation and reveal the complex images of women in the Third World, based on the multiple realities in which they live and their different locations in the social strata. In doing so, she concludes that women in the Third World are as complex as women from the First World and that their experience of subordination differs with local social and political context as well as the class, ethnicity or culture to which they belong. Mohanty argues that feminist texts produced by some of the western authors on women in the Third World seem to forget that the west still maintains a certain balance of power in knowledge production and dissemination and that this affects women in the Third World. The implication of the assumptions underlying the author’s thinking is that women in the Third World are their own subjects and can well represent themselves. Concepts such as patriarchy, male control of women’s sexuality or sexual segregation should not be imported and applied as they are within the

western context. Rather, they should be referred to or applied according to the local context of the society or community being studied. This line of reasoning leads to the rejection of false generalizations and assertion of false universality, a universality that was sought to create a sense of shared commonality in which feminists tried to build solidarity against a common enemy (read: men) and system of oppression (patriarchy, domesticity, the family, religion, etc.). Instead, the author favours working together, recognizing the differences between women searching for common ground on issues affecting them in particular times and contexts.

Narayan (1997) adds to Mohanty's critique of western feminism. She draws a parallel between both western colonialist and anti-colonial nationalist constructions of the Indian woman. She argues that both were based on "idealized" cultural values that justify their positioning, which was dictated by their political agendas. In fact, the author argues that both rely on exaggerated constructions of "otherness" that "overplayed differences while ignoring similarities and assimilations" (Narayan 1997: 402). Pushing her argument further, she draws another parallel between British Victorian feminists and Indian nationalist men's role with regard to the construction of the Indian woman "as a site upon which to ground their demands for political liberation and agency, giving them both an Other to 'speak for' in a context where 'speaking for' was 'one of the prerequisites of political subjectivity'" (p. 403).

Nevertheless, while efforts to attend to the differences between women remain essential in feminist thought, Narayan (1998) warns feminists, especially Third World feminists, to be wary of being trapped by culturally essentialist views. She exposes the problems posed by cultural essentialism, particularly for the Third World feminist agenda. Narayan (1998: 89) writes that "failing to see that 'cultural imperialism' involves both sorts of problems, attempts to avoid the Scylla of 'Sameness' can often result in moves that leave one foundering on the Charybdis of 'Difference'". Narayan draws a parallel between gender essentialism and cultural essentialism to illustrate the workings of cultural essentialism. In other words, while gender essentialism assumes the problems, issues or interests of women belonging

to a particular dominant group to be the problems, issues or interests of all women, cultural essentialism assumes the values and practices of the culture of the dominant group to be those of all members of other groups.

Narayan (1998) joins Mohanty (2003) in arguing that some feminists, motivated by a wish to avoid universalistic essentialist generalization, tend to fall into culture-specific essentialist generalizations, which only differ in degree rather than in kind; that is, gender and cultural identities are produced and reproduced through assumptions based on discursive binaries that endorse differences. Hence, opposing binaries most often reveal the superiority of a socially dominant group/norms to the constructed "other", depending on the ideological purpose of the construction.

> In both cases, the discursive reiteration of such "essential difference" operates in a manner that helps construct the sense of gender identity and of cultural identity that shapes the self understanding and subjectivities of different groups of people who inhabit these discursive contexts. (Narayan 1998: 88)

The key message is to encourage feminists in general and Third World feminists in particular to avoid political resistance based on replication and reification.

The material/cultural feminist debate

Bringing back the conversation to the shift of interests in feminist thought: Fraser (1995) reflects on two opposing claims that are at the origin of what she calls "the redistribution–recognition dilemma". While the first stance reflects concerns with material inequality (more particularly, socio-economic injustices), the second is based on cultural domination and focuses on identity politics of difference. Fraser believes that both redistribution and recognition politics are the necessary tools for social justice and proposes that the relationship between them be examined in order to combat both types of injustices when they arise simultaneously.

Fraser's (1995) argument rests on the fact that both the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition can have contradictory aims. While one promotes social equality by erasing difference, the other endorses difference and specificity to correct cultural devaluation: "The two kinds of

claims thus stand in tension with each other; they can interfere with, or even work against one another" (Fraser 1995: 74). Therefore, she proposes "a critical theory of recognition" that will be able to identify the different versions of cultural politics of difference and defend only those that could be combined with the social politics of equality. "Both gender and race are paradigmatic bivalent collectivities" (p. 78); in other words, both gender and race are affected by socio-economic and cultural factors and call for the remedies of both redistribution and recognition to combat economic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition. Fraser goes on to explore corrective and transformative remedies put in place both by the welfare state and states influenced by socialist models. She also explores remedies that apply either multicultural or deconstructive approaches to correct past misrecognition. She concludes by suggesting the simultaneous use of transformative-deconstructive approaches to resolve the redistribution–recognition dilemma. In the process, Baum (2004: 1085) comments, Fraser ends up construing "cultural misrecognition" in relation to social status, "as a matter of social subordination".

While Fraser's (1995) aim was to resolve the tension between the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition to bring about social justice in a post-socialist age, recurrent debates on the conception of woman as a category of analysis have animated feminist discourse. Accordingly, Mohanty (2003), for example, exposes western feminist scholars' use of the term to demonstrate the subordination of women as universal. While Mohanty reiterates that through this process the representation of Third World women as powerless and dependent becomes the object rather than the subject of feminist discourse, Alcoff (1988) brings us back to what has been termed the feminist identity crisis. She introduces us to post-structuralism by referring to the debate on the concept of woman between those attached to cultural feminism and post-structuralists.

3. Post-structuralism in the era of postmodernism

Post-structural/cultural feminist debates

Alcoff (1988) argues that, as the central concept of feminist theorizing, the concept of "woman" needs to be responsive to questions raised by those

who identify as women to contest their oppression or subjugation. She highlights the need to take into account the positions of the different categories of women to conceptualize “woman” in feminist theory without falling into the essentialism of cultural feminists or the nominalism of post-structuralists. She explains that while cultural feminists “define women by their activities and attributes in the present culture”, post-structuralists build on the problematic of the category of women itself and the question of subjectivity that it implies (Alcoff 1998: 407). The author highlights the positive points of both views while also stressing their limits. While cultural feminists redefine and propose a reappraisal of previously undervalued activities and attributes of women, as opposed to the positive ones ascribed to men, they fail to challenge the oppressive mechanisms that create these views. Consequently, they do not offer a long-term plan for feminist action. On the other hand, post-structural feminists have questioned the existence of the category of women as such and offered feminists the possibility of deconstructing the concept of women, exposing it as a social construction as well as exposing the restrictive conditions that gave rise to women’s oppression.

However, while Alcoff (1988) approves of the post-structural feminist critique of subjectivity, she questions the “negative function” suggested by Kristeva, whose conception of political struggle implies the rejection of “everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society” (Kristeva 1981, cited in Alcoff 1998: 418). Alcoff cautions feminists about a “feminism that can only be deconstructive and, thus, nominalist once again” (p. 420). Alcoff pushes the argument further by asking how we can speak of sexism if the category of “woman” does not exist. She argues that post-structural feminists’ position on subjectivity as a social construct and their rejection of the authority of the subject coincide agreeably with the liberal view of the individual as irrelevant in the process of knowledge production. Alcoff joins De Lauretis (1984), who explored a way out of the dilemma posed by nominalism via the use of subjectivity as “constructed through a continuous process, an on-going constant renewal based on interactions with the world, which she defines as experience” (De Lauretis

1984: 5). In other words, subjectivity is constructed through a process, an ongoing interaction of the individual within its societal network, which De Lauretis identifies as experience, by which one's subjectivity becomes engendered. For De Lauretis, experience is combined with reflection – that is, the practice of a self-analysing subject in constant motion within its social reality.

Alcoff (1988: 433–434) proposes a definition of a woman through positionality, as a set of particular positions that "make her identity relative to a constantly shifting context", and through her position in society, which "can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where a meaning can be discovered (the meaning of femaleness)". In other words, she defines the concept of a woman through a woman's position relative to an existing cultural and social network, in which she "actively contributes to the context within which her position can be delineated" (Alcoff: 434). Conversely, McNay (2004, 2008, 2010) argues that feminists should move away from an "abstract level of micro structural analysis and develop mediatory concepts" (2004: 177).

McNay: "radical habitus" and women's activism

McNay (2004) builds on the debate between material and cultural feminists and argues that the impasse can be bypassed through mediating concepts such as agency. She challenges both material and cultural feminist assumptions that refer to gender, either as a structural location or a location within symbolic or discursive structure, and argues for an interpretation of gender as a lived relation. She asserts that mediating concepts could be used to make visible the lived reality of social relations. She refers to Wood's (1995) analysis of class as a lived experience and argues that the same analogy could be extended to other oppressive structures such as gender, ethnicity, race, etc.

With regard to the term agency, McNay (2004) assumes that, far from being an abstract social structure, agency is anchored in experience. She invokes the problematic notion of experience and argues that post-structural

feminists' rejection of the category of experience as an analytical tool leaves them without a workable concept. Instead, she proposes solving the problem by drawing on Bourdieu's account of phenomenology of space.

McNay (2004) affirms that Bourdieu's phenomenological study of social space offers grounds for an understanding of gender as a lived social relation rather than as a structural discursive location. Through the exposition of Bourdieu's framework of phenomenology of social space, McNay reiterates Bourdieu's arguments in relation to objectivist and subjectivist analysis of agency, which relies on objectivist concern about social structures that disregard the importance of social interactions and the question of agency. On the other hand, the subjectivist focus on the representation of social actors minimizes the effect of social structures. Disregarding how social reality is determined by interaction and representation cannot make visible social action (activism) with regard to the analysis of agency.

Lovell (2003: 1) has also contributed to the discussion on agency: "the problem of agency in relation to social transformation continues to haunt feminist theory". She recognizes Butler's (1997) achievement "in establishing the *possibility* of agency", but questions its effectiveness as an analytical tool within a given historical context in relation to a particular social change movement. Lovell finds that Butler's analysis is too narrowly focused on the agency of the transformative self rather than concentrating on the social relations of political interactions and specific historical transformations. Lovell consequently adds both dimensions of the social relations of political interactions and specific historical transformations to Butler's analysis: "My argument will be that Butler's strategy for traversing the edge is hampered by the focus on 'the (subjected) self' rather than on the social relations of political (inter)action, and the specific historical conditions of particular social transformations" (Lovell 2003: 2). Lovell illustrates her point by referring to Butler's example of the historical action of Rosa Parks that served as a catalyst in igniting the civil rights movement in the United States. She argues that when Butler wrote that Parks "endowed a certain authority on the act" (Butler 1997a: 41, cited in Lovell: 2), the emphasis was placed on Parks

acting as an individual agent of change, when in reality transformative political agency lies in the interaction of collective movements. Agency does not necessarily bring out transformative change.

McNay (2010: 512) continues the effort to understand what makes an action political or not and "what (inclines) individuals to act in a political manner; to engage with their own understanding and interpretation of self and the world". She refers to the debate between those whom she identifies as "identity and post-identity feminists". McNay argues that although post-identity feminist concern with the limited aims of the politics of recognition is justified, their focus on the abstract notion of indeterminacy to explain radical agency denies subjects' capacity to apprehend and act according to their own understanding of the social world. She writes that

> The idea of radical agency as indeterminacy lacks any phenomenological underpinning and, as a result, fails to advance thought about the social conditions necessary for the emergence of effective political agency. It is important that post-identity theorists deal with such underlying questions about the mobilization of political consciousness and agency, given that identity politics are often rooted in the deeply felt injuries of misrecognition. It is necessary to engage with this experiential substrate in order to understand how it may be possible to convince individuals to move beyond a politics of recognition. By disregarding the social conditions of possibility for effective agency, the important arguments of post-identity feminists remain rather ungrounded exhortations that do not connect to the embodied experience of the very subjects they wish to mobilize. (2010: 514)

It is clear that feminist theorizing on women's resistance/activism has evolved over time and continues to evolve through different debates. While some favour material justifications, others opt for cultural or post-structural explanations. However, solutions to transcend divisions are provided and continue to feed feminists' discussions. As seen above, some post-structural feminists (McNay 2010; Lovell 2003) have rejected what has been termed the "linguistic turn", a defining characteristic of post-structuralism, adopting instead Bourdieu's phenomenological explanation of social space to bypass the material/cultural and/or the identity/post-identity debate.

Now that I have explored the issue of women's activism from a theoretical perspective, in the following section I will try to highlight how theory and practice are reflected in the literature on women's activism.

III. Women's activism

The examination of some of the literature underlying women's activism in different contexts illustrates that the same gender ideology of the dominant power systems operates within the resistance movements. Stewart, Settles and Winter (1998: 64) affirm that "traditional studies on political behaviour are based on the androcentric model of the public sphere and 'the political' which inevitably exclude women". They also add that when women are included in the studies, often more attention is paid to activities related to their role in the family.

In comparative research to investigate the role played by African American and South African women in the 1950s during the Montgomery bus boycott and the anti-pass resistance social movements, Kuumba (2002) draws on social movement theory and the political process model to examine and reveal the leading, but unrecognized and invisible, role played by autonomous or semi-autonomous women's local structures. The author uses gendered social movement patterns, defined by West and Blumberg (1990) as ranging from gender-independent and gender-parallel to gender-integrationist patterns, to locate the women's structures or networks under study. Kuumba (2002) contends that while women work for the same larger goal of racial equality or national liberation, within a gender-parallel structure or gender-integrated organizations their contribution remains invisible, in contrast with the high visibility of the contribution of men working in male-led formal organizations. She argues that women's participation occurs within grassroots or local-community-level settings or structures in which their contributions have remained undervalued. However, she stresses that women's networks play a bridging role between the people and the larger resistance movements as women use these informal networks to act without being undermined by the male members of the social movements.

Moreover, Kuumba (2002) criticizes social movement theory as inherently androcentric and male-biased, and the political process model as already overextended to accommodate resistance movements. She argues that gender perspectives inform the political process model, enabling it to take into account the different structural positioning and experiences of men and women when located within the larger system of power (where the interconnected effects of gender, class and race affect the everyday lives of the oppressed, constrain or catalyse a social movement). Kuumba's (2002) research also illustrates how a gendered political ideology has served the cause of women and created opportunities for women in both countries to set political action in motion (a political opportunity only for women, due to their location on the gendered political system). As she puts it, "gendered structures and identities served as a double-edged sword, serving to limit and/or eclipse women's activism" (p. 519).

In the case of the Ethiopian activists of the early 1960s, the political situation opened the door to political action for them, but the "woman question" of the women's movement remained in the background. Zenebework Tadesse, a former member of the Ethiopian Student Movement, argues that "the situation made it clear to everyone, the impossibility of establishing an independent group, and it was sad and frustrating. The momentum was not there to create a movement, and to my mind it was a missed opportunity" (as quoted in Alem 2008: 143). Several reasons have been formulated to explain this missed opportunity, but the most acknowledged is the priority that was given to structural system change in the hope that equality for women would eventually be achieved. The "woman question" was, in fact, later put forward on the political agenda for the first time by the subsequent military government (Women's Affairs Office at the Prime Minister's Office 2007). Biseswar (2008), however, reveals her disappointment with the careerist rather than collectivist attitude and the lack of commitment to radical change among educated Ethiopian women of today.

Similarly, Biglia (2006), in "Some 'Latin' women activists' accounts: reflection on political research", examines the constructed meaning of politics and its effect on women's activism and proposes possible approaches to practising

feminist political psychology. The key question addressed in this article is directly related to the participants' experiences of political action. By examining how the women activists in the study characterize their activism and their beliefs regarding whether their activism is influenced by their gender, the author tries to explore how politics defines and affects their lives. This reveals the constructed gender bias within the meaning of politics and also how it is articulated in social movements. She joins Kuumba (2002) in arguing that "women's politics and activism suffer a double exclusion from being considered as political" (Biglia 2006: 18). That is to say, women's activism is usually considered as informal and therefore less important than men's activism. In addition, as articulated by one of the interviewees, women's community networks and action are considered as "second division militancy" (p. 18).

This seems to have been the case for the Ethiopian female students and the freedom fighters. In her book *Candace: invisible women of Ethiopia,* Alem (2008: 130) asserts that Ethiopian women's organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s were not even "recognized as 'real' organizations", and adds that they were even called "Study Groups to show that they were not equal with the political parties and reinforce their subordination". Her description of the study groups and location of female students within the resistance movement illustrates a gender-integrationist movement that allows women to participate in political actions, although their participation is overshadowed by that of their male peers. Thus, while women's participation within the larger resistance movements is clear, their roles are undermined or relegated to secondary positions.

Biglia's (2006) article reveals that there is a need for further reflection on gender relations within social relations. Emphasis is also given to the conscious decision to reflect the perspective that listens "to the speaking subjects who actively claim this position" rather than the perspective that gives "voice to the victims" (Burman 1998: 14). Within this context, the author maintains that a redefinition of "politics" that takes into account the realities of their experiences should occur. Her aim is not to give "a definition of politics but rather to offer some steps in the never-ending process of self-

analysis and self-criticism in the hope that we can proceed together" (Biglia 2006: 23).

Both Kuumba (2002) and Biglia (2006) agree on the empowered positions that women in general and women activists in particular have achieved in recent years by conforming to or competing within the traditional male world. What does this mean? Women are gaining access to leadership positions, yet still in a limited way. For example, they continue their activism and contribute to social change by creating women's movements within civil society organizations. That is, they are still conforming to the traditional dichotomy, which puts them in a parallel structure, but it does give them a strategic location from which to carry out their actions, actions that have registered some positive yet limited results.

While Kuumba (2002) and Biglia (2006) study women's political participation as opposed to men's, and shed light on the androcentric nature of previous studies, Poster (1995) focuses only on women's organizations and expands the study by including the dimension of class and race. She explores the meaning and the consequences of class and racial diversity among organizations in the women's movement. While this study concerns issues prevalent in an affluent society, in this case the United States, to a certain extent, it can also illustrate the complexities that can be encountered in the Ethiopian multi-ethnic context. One can draw a parallel between elite women's organizational concerns and those presented by urban/rural grassroots organizations.

Poster's (1995) comparative research of two groups of organizing women located at the extremes of the women's movement spectrum – the corporate women (CW), comprising only white upper-class women, and the low-income women (LIW), comprising low-income African American women – examines the contrasts in the ideology, goals and strategies that these two groups of organizing women represent. The CW's ideology and activism paradigm are more in sync with those of liberal feminists, who advocate the evolution of women's movements within the exiting system and the full participation of women in mainstream society via equal individual

opportunity. On the other hand, LIW's ideology is more socialist in nature and seeks collective action to change the actual social structure to create a more just society. The author's argument is that these differences of ideology and paradigms are the effect of racial and class differences that characterize the memberships of these organizations. Thus, the social location of the members in larger society somehow determines the organizing styles and modes of operation. While CW members follow the dominant system's mode of functioning according to hierarchical values, LIW members favour the participatory model, which reflects their view of the system in place. With regard to the strategies, the author argues that, although coalitions and alliances have been formed to solve common problems in the past and future alliances are achievable and deeply encouraged, the contrast in ideological perspectives, the structural and social positioning of women and the divergent organizational strategies nonetheless make it difficult to work together and solve the challenges that women face in their daily lives today.

With regard to the importance of race and class within women's organizations, the main assumption that Poster (1995) makes is that of the oppression of all women in society. This line of thinking highlights the reasoning that fosters the split that exists between CW and LIW. African American women claim "a double jeopardy" of race and class, while white middle-class women are merely discriminated against as women. CW members' focus is on sexism, which they believe is the root of their oppression. They argue that women's movements should draw on the similarity of their positions in society and should join forces. On the other hand, LIW members affirm differences between women and emphasize the interconnected nature of oppression based on race, class and gender.

With regard to women's activism in the African context, many authors are critical of the politics of the different directions and experiences of women's attempts at activism. African feminist literature examines the proliferation of women-centred local NGOs and gender activism and studies in Africa (Ahikire 2005; Pereira 2005; Prah 2005). Concern is also expressed about the level of autonomy tolerated by different governments. Oloka-Onyango and Tamale (1995) expose cultural relativism and Tripp (2001) includes the

practice of co-optation, which hinders autonomous women's organizations. Pereira (2005) denounces the de-radicalizing of the feminist agenda when serving the state, accepting donor-driven programmes and professionalizing gender and women's studies that dominate activist agendas. Prah (2005: 38) warns about the middle-class status and aspirations of "civil society", which may impede social transformation. Arnfred (2004: 76) supports the inferences by affirming that "through the terminology of gender women's issues have become de-politicized". Moreover, Mohanty (2003) argues that decolonizing texts undermine the complex experiences of women in the Third World.

Ethiopian women's organizations are aware of the multi-ethnic nature of their membership. However, to what extent ethnicity and class difference affects the ideology, strategies and organizational style of women's organizations is an open field for study. Individually, critical consciousness informs Ethiopian women activists' achievements. Collectively, women's organizations are not only aware of the multi-ethnic nature of their membership but also their vulnerability to poverty. Thus, they claim social change as the principal and common political agenda. Several instruments have been explored. For example, as Almaz (1991: 2) argues, Women in Development (WID) ignored "the centrality of women in development … thus further marginalizing women in the development process" … while Gender and Development (GAD), she argues, "establishes the centrality of women's roles as fundamental to development". However, Arnfred (2005: 120) counters that "the opposite seems to have happened", as gender, a neutral term, does not carry the implications that the term "women" has with regard to "women's specific and often marginalized positions".

Hence, strategies ranging from rights-based approaches (Gready and Ensor 2005) to the capabilities approach (Nussbaum 2000), including WID and GAD, are all examples of the instruments used by organizing women to transform African women's realities. In relation to the different policy approaches to WID, Molyneux (2003) examines three central concepts to "the woman question" in socialist states and presents what she terms women's interests, practical gender interests and strategic gender interests.

On the other hand, Moser (1989) later proposes the idea of basic gender needs vs strategic gender needs to describe the dilemma faced by women in the Third World and integrate gender into planning. Moreover, donors' influence in development issues in general and gender in particular is a reality in today's Africa. Consequently, taking into account the influence of donor agencies,[18] it would be interesting to investigate the extent of donor incentives versus the level of individual or collective engagement of Ethiopian women. In order to gain a better understanding of Ethiopian women's activism, I shall explore the narratives of the lived experience of women activists to improve women's lives.

[18] Many African feminists write about the important role of donor agencies: "Donor-dominated development" (Arnfred 2005: 120) "driven by donors" (Pereira 2005: 19). How we deal with it is the question that activists have to take into consideration. In the case of Ethiopia, a law was enacted in 2009 that means that only local/Ethiopian NGOs can work in the field of human rights; and only 10% of their financing can be from international sources.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Shift of paradigm: feminist epistemology rooted in Ethiopian women activists' realities

To identify and observe the power relations governing women's oppression, a feminist epistemology posing research questions based on the particular experiences of women in the Third World (Wieringa 1996; Mohanty 2003) will inform the study. Many non-western feminists as well as African American scholars have criticized some of the feminist methods as quite normative and western/white oriented (Narayan 1997; Collins 1989, 2000; hooks 2000; Hutardo 2003; Mohanty 2003). Mohanty (2003) challenges the representation of women in the Third World in some western feminist texts and sheds light on the effect of the creation of a universal image of women in the Third World, specifically in the context of knowledge and scholarship production. Consequently, a Third World women's perspective, with a decolonized conceptual framework that focuses on the meaning attributed by Ethiopian women to their experiences of activism, will be central in this research. Therefore, the subaltern methodology is especially valuable to this study as it is designed to address the absent voices of history and reveals the hidden history of subalterns: in this case, the Ethiopian women activists and their understanding of Ethiopian social and/or revolutionary movements.

In agreement with Dillard's (2000: 662) methodological proposition to establish an "endarkened feminist epistemology", in which the author articulates "how reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black feminist thought", I will attempt to propose a new reading of Ethiopian women's political and social engagement grounded on specific thinking they articulate actions they choose to perform, and ways they act. Dillard's "endarkened" feminist epistemology is based on four commonalities: the use of meanings of lives to understand and analyse the lived experience of women; the insider/outsider position of the researcher; the idea of "research as a responsibility, answerable and obligated to the very persons and communities being engaged in the inquiry"; and finally the inclusion of the

question of wisdom, relevant in the everyday life of the studied subjectivities, in this case Ethiopian women. Dillard's approach addresses my motivation to listen to, record and examine the absent voices of Ethiopian women; my outsider/insider position, my researcher/activist location and my own complex identity inform my choice of the topic and my worldview, a worldview that aligns with that of those who believe that research is not value free and that cooperation with participants, rather than the researcher holding a position of power, is valued.

Consequently, this study is informed by a feminist epistemology drawing on Dillard's (2000) "endarkened feminist epistemology" and subaltern methodology in order to listen to Ethiopian activists and analyse what makes them think and act the way they do. This is achieved through qualitative research methods using life story narratives as a principal approach to enquiry. The choice of qualitative methods, consistent with my research framework, is the best way to explore how the experts, the activists themselves, reflect on and reconstruct their life stories in relation to their activism and give meaning to their personal experiences. In so doing, I was able to analyse emerging issues in relation to social structures and patterns of women's political and social engagement in Ethiopia.

Why life story narratives?

Bertaux (1981: 7, cited in Ojermark 2007: 3) notes that, "generally speaking, there is a certain terminological confusion in the field, as these [various][19] terms … have been used almost interchangeably". As well as Bertaux, other authors (Smith 1994; Atkinson 2002; Robson 2002) mention the different notions in use to describe life history methods. For the purpose of this research, I have used the term "life story narrative" as proposed by Ojermark (2007: 4) in her review of the literature on life history methods, to refer to

> the account of a person's story of his or her life, or a segment of it, as told to another. It is usually quite a full account across the length of life but may refer to a period or aspect of the life experience.

[19] Here are a few of the different terms: bibliographical life history, life story narrative, personal narrative, and life history approach.

Accordingly, this research gives women activists the opportunity to give full accounts of their life stories, focusing on the aspects of their activist experience.

The life story narrative approach used in this research is in line with Elliott's (2005) argument, which affirms that this approach helps the researcher gain an understanding of the social world from the perspective of the individual being studied. This also helps to explain why people make particular decisions or follow particular courses of action. In consolidation of this view, while Sands (2004: 49) argues that life story narratives give more emphasis to the activists' exploration of "the way in which the self is constructed in the act of storytelling", Lieblich et al. (1998: 9) add that "by studying and interpreting self-narratives, the researcher has access, not only to the individual's identity and its system of meaning, but also to the teller's culture and social world".

Life story narrative: its limitations and contradictions

I am aware of the multiple criticisms of life history methods within social sciences research. The fact that life history/life story methods originated from literary studies is definitely a strong reason why these methods are perceived more as artistic than as scientific methods (Lieblich et al. 1998). Moreover, Silverman (1997, cited in Robson 2002: 248) provides a warning that there has been a "romantic influence on contemporary sociology which gives the 'experimental as authentic'". Bourdieu's (1986) severe scepticism of biographical research emerges in his article "The biographical illusion", and this i.e. his scepticism reinforces the difficulties associated with biographical life history methods. Underneath these criticisms lies the assumption that there is no objective truth that can be derived from life stories. Nonetheless, the assumptions of my research coincide with Atkinson's (2002: 125) suggestion that provides the basis for the "narrative turn":

> The movement towards life stories, where we tell our own stories in our own words, is a movement towards acknowledging personal truth from the subjective point of view as well as a movement towards the validity of narrative. A life story narrative highlights the most important influences, experiences, circumstances, issues, themes, and lessons

> of a lifetime. As such a life story can be both a valuable experience for the person telling the story and a successful research endeavour for the one gathering data.

Atkinson's argument not only addresses the issue of what kind of truth emerges from life story narratives but also answers to controversies about the validity and reliability of life stories raised in the literature, such as the Rigoberta Menchú Tum case (Stoll 1999).

Sampling and selection criteria

Similar to multi-study feminist scholar Kampwirth (2002), and drawing on Patton's (1990) approach to sampling, I used a purposive sampling method: more specifically, snowball sampling. Many authors write about negotiating entry through gatekeepers to get access to participants. My former association with EWLA and the Centre for Research, Training and Information for Women in Development (CERTWID)[20] at Addis Ababa University has allowed me the privilege not only of meeting some of the leading activists but also of building long-term relationships of trust with the political as well as the social activists. Therefore, I recruited the first five participants through networks I was able to develop with local/international NGOs and/or women's organizations, as well as individual women political activists. The following interviewees have been selected through snowball sampling, from the people who know the area best: the activists themselves. Moreover, the scope of this study is not to generate a theory but rather to establish an understanding of the different dimensions of women's activism in recent Ethiopian history. The sample will not be representative of Ethiopian society from an ethnic perspective, in effect; the population of Ethiopia is formed of over 80 nationalities, and it is of course difficult to represent them all in a single research project. However, I paid explicit attention to drawing the sample from a variety of ethnic groups and I attempted to reflect the multiple identities and belief systems present in the country. Consequently, the sample has been composed of individuals belonging to at least four ethnic groups: Amhara, Gurage, Harari and Tigrayan.

[20] The centre has since been re-baptised as the Institute of Gender Studies at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

Moreover, the religious background of the interviewees has been used as a supplementary criterion for the purpose of diversity. Age has been another criterion for selection of the participants of this research. The ages of the interviewees range from 30 to 70, including those who participated in the Ethiopian Student Movement and lived through the upheavals of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, those who have participated in armed struggles, and those who grew up in revolutionary Ethiopia to become activists after the 1991 victory of the liberation fronts over the military regime. Therefore, the participants are composed of the following:

- former members of the Ethiopian Student Movement, members of EPRP, Meison (the Ethiopian Socialist Movement), and other political groupings
- members of TPLF
- a cadre member of the Derg period
- former or current members in urban, professional or development women's associations, and
- activists and gender experts in local and/or international NGOs and/or UN organs active in promoting gender equality.

Due to the amount of data generated by in-depth interviews, the aim was to interview between 15 and 20 participants. Each interview lasted between two and four hours in at least two rounds of interviews. I also undertook a small pilot study of interviews conducted in December 2012/January 2013 with a few candidates. Of the five preliminary interviews, four were over three hours long; one only lasted 90 minutes with the activist promising to answer any additional questions via email or Skype. The following series of interviews was undertaken during the summer of 2014.

Data collection process

The best way to explore how Ethiopian women activists reconstruct and give meaning to their experiences of political action has been to have conversations with them – that is, to hear them tell their stories from their own perspectives. In this case, my role has been to listen with empathy, encouraging the respondents to construct/reconstruct their stories, making

sense of the events that led them to their present position of activism. The pilot study, conducted in 2012/2013, gave me time to process some information, review my interview guide and incorporate lessons learned before conducting the second set of interviews after achieving transfer and ethical approval. Due to the amount of data generated by in-depth interviews, the number of interviewees was limited to 19 activists.

Data-gathering instruments: narratives within in-depth interviews

The objective has been to create the conditions necessary for each interviewee to tell her story in such a way that the researcher is able to shed light on the studied phenomenon. For Elliott (2005), the narrative approach within in-depth-interviews gives the responsibility of sharing the story to the interviewee. Elliott (2005: 18) opposes the realist/naturalist approach, which uses narratives as a means of collecting data, with the focus on the content of the narrative, while the constructive approach emphasizes the "interview itself as a topic of enquiry". Hence, while the former views the social world as out there, available to be explored and described, the latter views the social world as constantly changing and emphasis is placed on understanding the production of the social world. Conversely, Elliott (2005: 20) observes that many researchers avoid this dichotomy by advocating

> a reflexive approach to research in which the role of the interviewer, relevant aspects of his or her identity, and the details of the interaction between researched and researcher are understood as constituting an important part of the research evidence. In other words, the interactional form of the interview is seen as having an important relation to the content of the accounts provided by the interviewee. As such the form of the interview is a topic for inclusion in the research agenda.

What that concretely means, and what occurred during both the preliminary interviews I conducted in December 2012/January 2013 and the second set of interviews during the summer of 2014, is that I asked the participants to narrate their life stories. However, the question of reliability and validity in qualitative research needs to be raised and reflected on from the start. This search for consistent and coherent life stories called for, in this case, the preparation of a set of open-ended questions that were then used to elicit pertinent information that enabled me to find patterns of behaviour and

contextual situations relevant to my research. Therefore, an interview schedule was designed around four main points, each containing several unstructured open-ended questions. Once the participant had been informed of the purpose of the project and the consent form had been signed, I asked the participant to tell me their life story focusing on how they became activists. I also contributed to the conversation by proposing a four-point structure similar to a typical storytelling – that is, a story with a beginning, middle and end.

- Presentation: childhood, family life, educational/social background, social context during childhood, as well as influences (a person and/or an event) that they thought contributed to their becoming activists
- How did you become an activist? (Important events, catalysing moments or stories are solicited in the form of conversation)
- What does it mean to be an activist? (Their personal definition of what constitutes activism, the different characteristics and content of their activism (feminist or not) or, for example, whether they emphasize the individual or organizational side of their activism can be a relevant factor in what type of activism they adhere to or confirm the dominant type of activism of a period)
- Looking back: lessons learned in past and present life (here, the participants have the opportunity to evaluate – that is, they reflect on and analyse both their achievements and challenges)

Hence, they are asked to tell the story of their activist life in chronological order, focusing not only on the events that occurred but also on what they thought about the events, Listening well was crucial, as I had to mentally tick off the sub-questions covered for each main point. Sometimes, they continued their story and naturally passed on to the following point without any instigation on my part. For some of them, this is a practice they are familiar with because of newspaper articles featuring their achievements, etc. In other words, they have a ready-made story they have shared on previous occasions. In these cases, once they had told their story, I came back to them on certain points, soliciting authentic information that I believed would be of relevance to the research. On other occasions, if I thought they had

covered most of the sub-questions I had prepared, I led them to the next main question. However, that does not mean I cut off the interviewees to go on to the next question; rather, I was attentive and patient at the same time. What I learned from the interviews I conducted is that sometimes certain events that appear irrelevant to the researcher may have their own relevance and meaning for the participant. In this case, the researcher needs to be vigilant and remind herself/himself of her/his commitment to the shift of power towards the person telling the story and, most importantly, realize instead that the information could be pertinent in the construction of a participant's identity. For example, Tesfa spent more than 20 minutes on her dissidence within TPLF and her grievances regarding why she left the organization, with which she was highly engaged and to which she made a significant contribution, practically from its foundation. In this way, Tesfa's identity as a political activist who is attached to democratic principles emerges from her narrative.

Of the 19 interviewees, 13 chose to be interviewed at their workplaces; those who work in NGOs were pleased to show me where their daily activities took place. Some showed me their place of work and introduced me to their staff before the interview, while others chose to do this at the end of the interview. I think this process helped me grasp the essence of their work personas. In fact, going round the different offices and meeting their co-workers allowed me to see how the interviewees interact with personnel and sometimes with clients (which was the case with Almaze, who introduced a few of the women members of her organization to me). The interviews usually took place in the woman's office, where she would be seated behind her desk. All but two of the women have small and overcrowded office desks, with files and books. Almost all of them offered coffee, tea and snacks. On two occasions I conducted the interviews in conference rooms, and one took place in a library. Thus, the interviews were conducted in a convivial atmosphere. Finally, of the six remaining participants, five asked me to meet them in a coffee shop or a hotel lobby. Noise could have been an issue but the problem was minimized because we managed to find a quiet corner each time and because the tape recorder could be programmed to minimize

background noise and focus on sound from the interviewees' direction. On one occasion, however, the coffee shop, which had become crowded with people due to the rain, did become too noisy in the end, so the interviewee and I then agreed to conduct the interview at my house, which was close by.' That interview involved the fifth interviewee, who looked at me and asked me if I was the sister of so-and-so. I said yes. She said that I looked like my brother and told me that she used to live in my kebele during the time of the Derg. This is how I discovered that she was one of the two interviewees from the Derg era. Only one interviewee asked me to come to her house to conduct the interview; she probably did so because as a consultant she works from home. All the interviews were conducted during working hours. For each interviewee, I started with introductions, in which I reiterated and elaborated on what I had told them during the phone conversation in which I set up the appointment for the interview. Then I told them about my interest in women activists and the purpose of my project, as well as the structure I wanted them to follow in telling me their story. Then consent forms were signed and the interview process took place as described above.

Having informal discussions with individual women and assisting in discussion forums were also valuable opportunities for gathering data. For example, I met W/ro Guenet Guebre Christos (whose testimonies are discussed in chapter eight) for the first time during a Christmas visit to Ethiopia in 2004/2005 at my unofficial advisor's house. Over the years, I saw her at the same place on a few occasions; however, little did I know that she was head of the women's section of Development Through Cooperation Campaign during the Derg period, until we met again on 12th December 2012, when both of us were visiting our common friend; our host, who knew about my research interest, told her that I was working on the subject of Ethiopian women activists and invited her to tell me stories from that period. This was the first time she shared revealing stories with me that were relevant in terms of Ethiopian women's sexual liberation.

Moreover, taking advantage of my family's move back to Ethiopia, to live there from September 2015 to July 2016, I was able to attend a few discussion forums organized by the Association of Women in Business

(AWiB). The association defines itself as a volunteer-driven membership association that "envisions being a leading catalyst for Ethiopian female leaders to connect, emerge and grow together". I assisted in two of their workshops specifically dedicated to feminist themes. The first, at the Addis Ababa Hilton Hotel on 10th March 2016, examined "Ethiopian feminism". The second discussed "The dearth of women in leadership in Ethiopia" and took place at the Addis Ababa Sheraton Hotel on 25th March 2016.

Other, more conventional data-gathering methods, such as document analysis, have been used as tools to understand the historical and contextual background of the specific periods under study. Articles in the *Ethiopia Observer* (1957), written by pioneers and edited by Sylvia Pankhurst,[21] and particularly the special edition entitled "The Ethiopian woman", were valuable in analysing the pioneers' perceptions, thoughts and actions. Through testimonies of Tigrayan women, Hammond's (1989) book also provides insights into the frame of mind of TPLF guerrilla combatants in the midst of the war against the Derg. Hence, it offers the possibility of comparing what the interviewed TPLF women combatants thought then and what they think now. The result is that, although their overall assessment of the process is positive, the combatants are more critical of certain issues today (this will be seen in chapters six and eight). I have also referred to what has been written about women activists in other countries, and particularly in African countries, in order to ground this study in a broader knowledge base. Maxwell (1998) adds that comparison of other countries' literature on similar subjects is used to test the validity threat in qualitative research.

Moreover, written material in the form of articles/interviews complemented my interviews. The articles/interviews are the product of Alem's (2008) book project, realized with the cooperation of the Ethiopian Media Women's

[21] Sylvia Pankhurst, a British suffragette influenced by socialist politics, was known as one of the friends of Ethiopia who led the campaign against the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. In 1956 she moved with her son to live permanently in Ethiopia, where she helped to found the Social Service Society. She also edited a monthly periodical entitled the *Ethiopia Observer*, a special edition of which on "The Ethiopian woman" was published in 1957, and pioneers Senedu Gebru and Mary Tadesse were enabled to make their contributions. It is interesting to know to what extent Sylvia Pankhurst the feminist influenced the pioneers' social activism. Sylvia died in Addis Ababa on 27th September 1960 (Simkin 1997).

Association (EMWA). The articles/interviews consist of the English translations of interview transcriptions of 22 Ethiopian women from different backgrounds described as role models in *Candace: invincible women of Ethiopia*. After being informed of my inability to access the articles/interviews that were to be found on the website, www.Ethiopianmillennim.nl, EMWA provided me with the transcription in 2009.

Data analysis process

The literature on life stories shows that narratives generate a lot of data. Therefore, use of the NVivo software to facilitate the data analysis process was considered. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the fact that the interviews were to be mainly conducted in Amharic (the official Ethiopian working language) and then transcribed by hand, the translation and the typing of all the data generated would have meant a high investment of time and work. Therefore, the data was analysed using traditional methods.

Once the decision was made to proceed without the use of software, my first act in analysing the data after data collection was the verbatim transcription of the first 10 interviews. They were handwritten in Amharic, the language used for most of the interviews. I then reviewed the accuracy by reading along while listening to the tape-recording, comparing the transcript to the tape. Reading and rereading the transcribed text, as well as the notes and memos I made during the conversation, provided “a sense of the overall data” (Creswell 1998: 140). At this point, reflective notes and memos, considered in an initial sorting-out process (Creswell 1998), were added on the blank space left for this purpose on the right-hand side of each page. They formed the basis for the emerging themes. The transcription and the subsequent translation process were very time-consuming.

The transcriptions were translated and typed. I subsequently organized and ordered the data into themes in an attempt to create some coherence from my raw data. This management of data can be considered as my first level of analysis. This process allowed me to understand what I was looking for, so I could reduce the time-consuming and tedious phase of the Amharic transcription and pass directly on to the translation phase for the following

nine interviews. For the remaining interviews, I started by listening to each interview a couple of times to identify and locate the relevant sections while taking notes. I subsequently proceeded to the translation of the extracts identified as pertinent to the research.

Ideal type as analytical tool

The use of the ideal type, an analytical construct, provides a heuristic device consistent with the assumption of a contingency between women's political action and the historical period in which it evolves. According to Weber (1963: 398, cited in Hendricks and Peters 1977: 32),

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (gedankenbild). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct (gedankenbild) cannot be found anywhere in reality.

In other words, the ideal type, which is constructed by taking certain characteristics of a phenomenon, does not try to reproduce reality as it is, but, rather, puts emphasis on certain elements in order to accentuate the commonality and/or the difference that exists between cases of the phenomenon. Moreover, conceptualized as a methodological tool that takes into consideration the subjectivity of scientific research, the ideal type facilitates the researcher's endeavour of comparison, analysis and interpretation. Hence, the use of the ideal type has been instrumental in categorizing the women activists into the three types: pioneers, revolutionaries and negotiators. The argument is that, despite the existence of different groups of women activists that have coexisted simultaneously, the dominance of one type over the others could be observed, depending on the period in question. Moreover, Hekman (1983) exposes how the concept of the ideal type provides a connection to or an analytical link between subjective meaning and structural forms by transcending the subjective/objective division.

Data management and analysis

While Creswell (1998: 154) notes that “biographical life history represents the least structured procedure for data analysis” and identifies “epiphanies, stories and historical contents” as the different dimensions of data analysis (p. 65) in the narrative of life stories, Maxwell (2005: 97) provides “organizational, substantive and theoretical categories” as tools that facilitate the data collection and data management/analysis process. Most often, organizational categories occur before data collection and assist the researcher to structure the interview/discussion schedule. Hence, organizational categories such as family/educational background, inspiration, achievements or challenges informed the interview guidelines, observed above and designed to solicit the life stories of the activists. Furthermore, the organizational categories contributed to the data management and analysis process as they represented the guiding themes of the narratives.

Data-gathering tools such as memos or field notes are very important as they play a central role at the data analysis stage (Creswell 1998). The holistic versus the categorical method of analysis “is preferred when a person as a whole, that is, his or her development in the current situation is what the study aims to explore” (Lieblich et al. 1998: 12). Therefore, after the data management and analysis phase described above, I continued with the data analysis and interpretation phases, using the holistic content perspective. Hence, I basically used Lieblich’s five specific steps of analysis: 1) read the text several times looking for emerging patterns or themes; 2) write my impressions and reflections, looking for striking episodes, contradictions or issues that seem to disturb the participant; 3) look for a central theme in the content that can be identified by the space it takes, its repetitiveness or the detail the participant offers about it; 4) mark the different themes with different markers and read them separately and repeatedly; and 5) follow each theme throughout the story and write my conclusion (1998: 62–63).

Consequently, while the ideal type provides an analytical framework for exploring the different types of women activists, the dual process combining Maxwell’s (2005) organizational category and Lieblich’s (1998) holistic

content perspective was valuable to explore the identities, perceptions and values of the storytellers, the interviewees of this study.

Ethical issues

Ethical issues must be considered throughout the whole research process, from research design to data analysis and interpretation. The research design was approved by the Committee for Ethics in Research of the University of Bradford. Requirements such as voluntary participation and informed consent,[22] as well as maintenance of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, not only help to protect the participants from harm but also help maintain the integrity of the researcher and the institution on behalf of which the study is carried out (D'Cruz & Jones 2004; Kreuger & Neuman 2006). Moreover, there are always risks in challenging societal values associated with gender. Hence, I have to make sure that these activists do not run more risk by participating in this research project than they do in their everyday lives. Therefore, if I gather information that could somehow lead to any harm, it is my responsibility to keep the promise of confidentiality to the best of my ability. This may go as far as the destruction of the information. However, this has not been the case for one of the interviewees, who argued that she does not need to be protected and insists on not remaining anonymous.

Last but not least, I am aware that my complex identity and feminist convictions affect my perceptions. In other word, issues of bias could emerge. However, these have been addressed by "making values explicit" and by consistently referring back to the research purpose (Gouldner 1976, cited in Kreuger & Neuman 2006: 126) and therefore to the content of the narratives.

Presentation of the participants

I contacted 22 women who had participated in a social movement or the guerrilla armed struggle and/or who had been identified as activists by others. All agreed to be interviewed, but three were unable to make the time to do so. As a result, 19 women were interviewed. Weber's framework of the

[22] Appendix A.

“ideal type” was used as an analytical tool to classify the 19 interviewees into two types: revolutionaries and negotiators.

As a consequence, I categorized 10 of them as revolutionaries and the remaining nine as negotiators. The revolutionaries are those who stated their participation in the different revolutionary organizations, including in armed struggles, in agreement with Kampwirth’s (2004) definition of women activists in revolutionary movements. On the other hand, the negotiators are those who, after the overthrow of the Derg, took centre stage and were engaged in leading civil society organizations. The theme linked to negotiation seemed suitable as it emerged from the women activists’ narratives and is connected to the type of activism in which they are engaged today.

All the participants were between the ages of 30 and 70 at the time of their interviews. Of the 10 revolutionary women, seven declared having participated in the Ethiopian Student Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and five of these stated that they were affiliated with one of the parties that emerged after the Revolution of 1974. The remaining two interviewees had both supported the Revolution and its socialist ideology but, while one acknowledged that she was a Meison sympathizer rather than an active member, the other, who was still a high school student during the Student Movement, had had to stop her activism temporarily as she had become a mother and, as a result, had had to revise her priorities to accommodate her caregiving role and had assumed the status of single mother at the time.

Of the three remaining revolutionaries, one interviewee participated in some of the student demonstrations while in high school, but she declared she was more active in her engagement with a youth association rather than the Student Movement per se. Later, she was recruited by the Derg and sent abroad for political education. For the other two, TPLF was the first movement they had joined and they continue to support and engage with it today.

Three participants were former TPLF guerrilla fighters who spent several years of their life in the armed struggle to overthrow the totalitarian military regime that took power in 1974. One started her activist journey during the student movement and has continued her engagement as a political activist to the present day. Of the remaining two former TPLF combatants, one is integrated in the Ethiopian Defence forces while the second has gone back to civilian life and occupies a leadership position dedicated to gender, in one of the ministries.

Each of the remaining nine activists either started her activism on an individual basis and later became involved in collective action within NGOs or has founded an NGO that focuses on a specific cause and organizes around issues she identifies as important in Ethiopian society. In most cases, the NGOs in which the women activists work were established after the new constitution of the FDRE was adopted on December 1994.

Of the 19 activists, one is the director of an international NGO and six are founding directors of local or resident NGOs working on issues affecting marginalized people in general and/or women and young people in particular. Nine are professional women contributing to the improvement of the political, economic and political status of women in Ethiopian society, either on an individual level or by working closely with specific NGOs or organized structures.

Ten of those interviewed are married, and all of the married women have one or more children. Five have been married but no longer are, of whom three are divorced and two widowed. Four have never been married and do not have children but help raise nephews and nieces. That is to say, despite the existence and increasing prevalence of nuclear families, the extended family also continues.

All the activists were graduates of higher education at the time of interview. The group includes one with a nursing diploma, eight with a bachelor's degree, three with an LLB (Legum Baccalaureus, or Bachelor of Law), five with a master's degree, one with an MPhil and another with a doctorate degree.

While eight stated that they come from rural Ethiopia in Wello, Kembatta, Arsi and Welega, the remaining 11 were born in either Addis Ababa or provincial towns such as Harar, Axum, Mekele and Adigrat. While some clearly presented themselves as coming from middle-class families, others modestly stated that their parents had sufficient income for the family and for occasionally supporting relatives/extended family or helping the needy.

Of the 19 interviews, 17 were conducted in Amharic, the official working language in Ethiopia, with some English words or expressions. Two were conducted in English, as both women chose to begin the interviews in English. For the rest, I have translated them to the best of my ability.

CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction to the Ethiopian women activists

Becoming activists

In order to present both the revolutionaries and the negotiators, I have selected extracts in which the interviewees describe who they are, what they do and the issues/causes to which they are committed. Furthermore, the extracts give an indication of the themes that emerged from the narratives. I also refer to the subaltern method, whereby, instead of presenting them through an authorial voice, I have presented the activists' own words. The subaltern method encourages and allows us to focus on their voices. The hope is that in the process it is possible to document their engagement and actions as they reveal the hidden history of women's lives during the pre-revolutionary, revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods.

The revolutionaries

The revolutionaries participated in the Ethiopian Student Movement and/or were active members or sympathizers of revolutionary parties such as Meison, TPLF and EPRP. While both EPRP and Meison were involved in the urban armed struggle that occurred between 1976 and 1978/1979, TPLF was a liberation front established in 1975 "to struggle for Tigrayan self-determination" (Hammond 1989: 24). Only two of the revolutionaries were members of structures under the control of the Derg regime. Hence, their aim was to bring about social change, first by becoming activists within a social movement, which for some later led to radicalized activism within armed struggles. However, they have not remained unchanged: they have grown or matured, and consequently their activisms have evolved over time according to context and the period in which they have lived. In their narratives, some choose to emphasize the way they see themselves now, or their current activism, while others accentuate their previous engagement. The extracts I have chosen to introduce them take these sensibilities into account. In other words, the following extracts might not necessarily describe their revolutionary activism but might focus instead on their current engagement.

Lemlem

Lemlem first talks about her social and educational background and then what it was like growing up. She then briefly talks about the revolutionary period and starts narrating her engagement with EWLA, their political activity and the challenges they faced. After hearing about EWLA's actions and her role within them for approximately an hour, I intervened and directed her narrative back to the past revolutionary period, which will be discussed in the next chapter. But first, here is who Lemlem is today:

> About a couple of years ago during an interview, the interviewer asserted that we [Ethiopian women activists] were not feminists. It did not matter to me … Let me give you concrete examples of what was important to us: making sure that crimes like rape or child abuse were classified among the crimes severely sanctioned by the law. With regard to FGM, even though public education on FGM is an important part of the solution, it also needed to be inscribed in the law. We never claimed outright that we are this or that, somebody somewhere may have written about us, but I have never heard about it. You can easily say I am a human rights activist, or I work on gender issues, this is how I see myself. If you need me to be precise, most of my work focuses around issues related to violence against women. I cannot tell you whether it was a conscious decision or not but … we [at EWLA] did a lot of lobbying, we organized demonstrations on violence committed against women, etc. … but we never claimed or connected ourselves to a worldwide feminist movement.

Lemlem is a lawyer and a founding member of EWLA, whose legal aid department she worked in during the first eight years of its existence. Currently, while she provides legal aid to women through other NGOs (international or local/Ethiopian), she continues her advocacy work mainly through research and public education workshops. Lemlem is also a former student movement activist, later affiliated to EPRP. She has been imprisoned several times and was tortured during the Derg period. A survivor of the Red Terror, Lemlem resumed her activist life after the overthrow of the Derg regime, as new opportunities opened up with the establishment of a new federal democratic state with a new constitution.

In the extract above, Lemlem names her activism; she says she is a human rights activist. She lists rape, child abuse and FGM as examples of crimes that were either generally seen as not serious or not seen as crimes at all, and were tolerated by society. In this way she unveils their prevalence and

their criminal nature, and hence the need for a legal framework to criminalize them. In order to do so – that is, to push for legal reforms that provide the basis for women's rights in Ethiopian society – EWLA set up actions such as lobbying, demonstrating and creating public awareness as part of its strategies for achieving this goal.

Kalkidan

Kalkidan is a gender scholar and a feminist who has spent the major part of her life working for the equality of women in all walks of life. She is a former student movement activist within the Ethiopian Students Union in North America (ESUNA)[23] and a former member of EPRP. Prior to her return to Ethiopia after the overthrow of the Mengistu regime, Kalkidan spent part of her professional life in research and advocacy:[24]

> When I came back in 1993 after the transition it was a very interesting moment, it was a moment for both possibilities and challenges. My attention went first to CERTWID, because even before my return from Dakar, a friend of mine and I came for a visit, and we wanted to know what was happening around gender issues. And sure enough, people were celebrating that the first gender conference had taken place in 1991 at AAU. By then, in the rest of Africa, gender issues had taken a completely different direction and we were really distressed about the possibility of that occurring [in Ethiopia]. We talked to a number of people so we were happy that CERTWID, at least, was reflecting on gender issues. So I became active with them within that initiative.
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> Then in 1993 or early 1994, Ene Meaza [Meaza and her colleagues] were trying to set up the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, I immediately became an associate member and tried to contribute to that as much as I could … As you know, EWLA opened a lot of doors, to discuss, put issues on the table, issues that were never discussed before. It provoked people to see the limits and possibilities of legislation, which in this country had been dormant. It allowed women's voices be heard in the public arena, facilitated things for others. It showed them that it was possible, so I participated in that and in any other gender forum that was organized during this period. Not only did I feel the need to influence outcomes but I also wanted to learn from them. When EWLA wanted to start a journal I encouraged them to do that. I was also the first guest editor. That did not last long

[23] The Ethiopian Students Union in North America is a branch of the Ethiopian Student Movement in the United States.

[24] Kalkidan was a founding member and first executive secretary of a continental (African) research institute dedicated to gender. Then she joined a much larger research institution in Africa.

> but while it lasted it was one more contribution to articulating gender issues.
>
> In the policy arena, before I left Dakar, one of the things I really wanted to do was set up an independent policy institution in Ethiopia. And I managed to do that. I was the founding member of an organization working on policy. In the setting up of this organization I was able to translate my commitment to gender equality through a policy of having a minimum of 40% female board members, making sure of gender issues were discussed and then subsequently having gender seminars. To this day my belief is that most African scholars, but particularly Ethiopian scholars, think that women should handle the so-called women question, which they refused to call a gender issue. It's not important enough for them to be involved in. So every seminar, every publication, every effort, is a struggle to point out this is part of any transformation of the country you are talking about. It's not something out there that could be just done by women. I think that, we did not make visible change but rather we just made the point.

In this extract, she describes the context and her frame of mind when she returned to Ethiopia. She expresses both her hopes and frustrations with regard to the issue of gender in Ethiopia. She tells us what she had set out to achieve, and what she was able to achieve, both collectively and individually. In so doing, she introduces us to three specific institutions/organizations to which she had made contributions through the sharing of her experiences and knowledge in her particular area of expertise: gender. While the first two organizations were established to improve women's lives, focusing specifically on the conditions of Ethiopian women and gender issues, the last one was set up to serve as a social forum in which social and political debates and discussions would occur, stimulating the development of new policies. What she tells us is that, as the founding member of this organization, she more or less succeeded in influencing and guiding the organization's internal policy and responsiveness to gender issues. However, she underlines a discrepancy between policy and action, and also a lack of commitment to and respect for gender issues in general, and the study of/research into gender in particular. She stresses the fact that a lot of male scholars in Africa, and particularly those in Ethiopia, still consider gender issues to be the domain of women. The implication is that for most male scholars in Ethiopia, gender is a marginal issue in the development process, while the development process itself is the "real" issue for the

transformation of the country. Consequently, she seems to suggest a certain form of resistance coming from academia, which in Ethiopia is still dominated by men. Hence, women and/or gender activists have made some progress but have still a long way to go, as they have yet to succeed in the difficult task of changing people's attitudes towards women and their place in society.

Rahel

"I was actually employed to do the things that I have been fighting for."

Rahel is an international gender expert with a law background who has spent most of her life defending the cause of women's rights, both professionally and individually. In fact, Rahel is also a former member of the Ethiopian Students Union in Europe (ESUE, the European branch of the Ethiopian Student Movement) and served as president/chair of its women's wing. In 1976, instead of continuing the doctoral studies her school was offering her in France, she returned to Ethiopia where she took on the responsibility of organizing women in revolutionary Ethiopia. A year later, Rahel, who was just a sympathizer rather than a member of Meison, was imprisoned for four years when the Derg broke its alliance with Meison. A couple of years after her release, she joined the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and then UNIFEM, where her career took off and she became the international gender expert described below:

> On a professional level I was very lucky when I started working at ECA [Economic Commission for Africa]. A couple of years later I went to the States and started working for UNIFEM. UNIFEM is the UN development fund for women. I spent 15 years working for UNIFEM, which I think were the best years of my life.
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> When I joined UNIFEM in 1985 in New York, everybody was heading to Nairobi because that was where the Third World conference of women was taking place. Everybody from the department had gone to the conference. So I sat there and read. I sort of learned about the international women's movement, what UNIFEM was doing, the agenda in the UN for women and so on. From 1985 to 2000 I was with UNIFEM, and from 1993 to 2000 I was the regional director in Senegal. The seven years I spent in Senegal I was basically working with women in 23 countries doing innovative and experimental work, not from the margins of development but in such a way that we could catalyse change and influence the bigger UN agencies about women's empowerment. It was a fantastic place to be.

> Then in 2000 I moved back to NY and became the Director of Gender and Development at UNDP. Hence, it was going from a small women's organization with fantastic opportunities to really work with grassroots organizations and leaders where you could work at different levels … to a bigger organization, UNDP. Changing UNDP from within was a big challenge. It takes different sets of skills. It takes a different approach because you are not necessarily in friendly territory. You know you are small, you are in the margins, and they want you to be there, because everybody is talking about gender mainstreaming and gender equality, so on and so forth, but they are not really serious about it. So you have to find a way to make them serious about the work and show them the benefits of investing in women. Everything I learned in 15 years in UNIFEM I brought with me to that position. And it really helped me. So, a lot happened. I wanted to see what seeds I could plant that could be sustained somehow. And I believe I did a good job, with a fantastic team in 45 countries, and it's still going on. In a nutshell that's basically what it is.

Three reasons made me choose to present Rahel through this extract. First, her introduction to the UN system coincided with an interesting moment in the history of the African women's movement. The important 1985 conference that took place in Nairobi connected and acknowledged the place of African women in the global women's movement in general and her journey as an Ethiopian woman activist in particular. The conference also marked the end of the UN Decade for Women, and it was thus time to evaluate what had been achieved during the previous decade. In fact, later in her narrative Rahel adds that UNIFEM itself

> is a creation of a women's movement. It is not by the will of the United Nations that one day we had an organization that's called UN Something for Women. The social movement was so strong in the seventies that they basically claimed a decade for women, from 1975 to 1985: it was the decade for women. Around the end of the decade, they said 10 years is not enough … In Nairobi, they said we have to have our own organization. That's how the UN developed a fund for women … At the beginning it was called UNDFW.

Second, Rahel offers both the insider perspective and the African woman's perspective about the workings of the UN system and the place of women within it. She maintains that although the strength of the women's movement had an impact in creating a space for women within the system, it was nonetheless a space in the margins. That was reflected both in the structure and the culture of the organization. This is illustrated in the way she describes her role with UNIFEM, where opportunities for both creativity and

change seemed more available than in UNDP, in which the interplay between resistance and marginalization was more of a challenge.

Last but not least, Rahel's personality as a women's rights activist who is profoundly attached to feminist principles is revealed as she depicts her experiences in general and her Senegal years in particular. One cannot help but realize the extent of both her commitment and her fulfilment as unravelled in this extract.

Emebet

Emebet is a former member of the ESUE and former editor of publications produced by its women's wing. Back in Ethiopia after the 1974 Revolution, she participated in the revolutionary struggle conducted by EPRP. In 1979 she was apprehended, tortured and thrown in jail by the Derg. After more than 11 years in prison, the transitional government that deposed the military regime released her and appointed her as the first gender advisor to the Prime Minister's Office and later as the head of the Women's Affairs Office (WAO).[25]

> I would like to start with a book entitled *Ye Ethiopia Setoch Raiye Keyet wedet*[26] that can be used as a reference. It tries to explain how it all started – you can call it women's activism or the Ethiopian women's movement. The story did not start with us, it began well before us. I was there at the birth of this book. I advocated for some kind of a record to be written on this issue when I was at the Women's Affairs Office. If you ask me why, when you become the first to be appointed to that position, the one who had to establish the first structures, the first policy, and at that point you think you have contributed or you have achieved something. You feel like you are a pioneer, and then later you realize that you were not. It was during the creation of the Ethiopian Grassroots Initiatives Development Fund, while researching background information that I came across an old man who had previously worked with the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association (EWWA). He came up to me and said "I like what you are doing, and I like what you are saying, and your commitment reminds me of those before you". When I asked him what commitment and whose achievement he was talking about, he brought me a magazine. On the front cover of the magazine was written "*Self ye djegna new*

[25] In 2000 she was nominated and served as Ambassador of Ethiopia in Ivory Coast and then France.

[26] Loose translation: Ethiopian women's vision/aspiration, from where to where?

> *limat ye hizb new".*[27] I was surprised when I saw that. Women such as the Gebru sisters, Senedu and Yewubdar, were featured in it, the pioneers you know. That is what prompted the publication of this book and we have included Princess Tsahai's speech. You see, the point is these women were either from the royal family or noble/privileged backgrounds, but what was written in the magazine could well have been written on any women activists [*tagay*][28] of today.
>
> I said, we should be ashamed really, look at what they have done, what they have achieved. Then Andreas took me to meet and talk to Sami's mum, W/ro Senedu, That's when I realized that not appreciating what has been done was really a shame. Looking back, I realize that we do not have anything to look up to and appreciate. People do struggle, and when they are done, the story ends there. What did they do, what did they say? What kind of challenges did they encounter? We don't know and we don't care to know. I think that is what has killed the Ethiopian women's movement. I really believe that, it has killed us.
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> Then we tried to remediate that, we published this book. Even before the book, we organized a big bazaar to honour these phenomenal women. Only six were alive, W/ro Senedu, W/ro Tsion, W/ro Ketsela, W/ro Sara Gebre Yesus, W/ro Tesseme, and W/ro Roman, I think – I am not sure about the last one. These were our suffragettes – in other countries, they are respected, and their contribution recognized in their history. We have to appreciate, we have to recognize our pioneers, I pushed for that, and it was a big challenge because you can easily be categorized as bourgeois or feudal, but I did not care.

This extract is especially relevant to this research as it echoes the theme of the hidden history of women. In this extract, Emebet pinpoints the problem of acknowledgement, or the recognition of women's contribution in society. In this case she does not go back to historical times or to medieval times; instead, she refers to the contribution of women of the previous generation. She reminds us of the significance of our acknowledgement and recognition of the role of women, both in the bigger picture of Ethiopian history and within the smaller context of social movements. Moreover, Emebet's call for acknowledgement of the pioneers' accomplishment is somewhat unexpected as she herself was a militant of the Revolution, engaged in abolishing the system in which these women achieved eminence: they worked to improve

[27] Again, this is an "approximate" translation of the expression: demonstrations/ marches are actions of heroes while development is the responsibility of the people.

[28] She uses the noun *tagay* in Amharic, which literally means a fighter; the verb, *tigle*, means to struggle. I have chosen to translate *tagay* as activist in accordance with some of the activists' suggested definitions of the word.

women's lives but still as part of the feudal system. Nevertheless, not only does she acknowledge their contribution, she also compares their commitment and actions to those known as suffragettes at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries in western societies. In so doing she connects the Ethiopian women's pioneers' actions to western feminist engagement and practice. Perhaps the comparison although symbolic is exaggerated, or even erroneous, as the suffragettes' main goal was getting women the right to vote, while the goal of the Ethiopian pioneers, to whom the 1955 Revised Constitution provided full citizenship, was mainly getting women equal access to education and employment, demands that were more similar to those of the western liberal feminists of the 1960s.

Not only does Emebet recognize the achievements of her predecessors, or her former opponents, but she also validates their actions by comparing them to those of any "*tagay"* of today. In so doing, Emebet links past and present struggles, illustrating the continuities of Ethiopian women's activism. Moreover, the title of the magazine is another good example of how the issues of yesterday echo those of today, confirming the existence of some form of continuity between then and now. Hence, this extract uncovers the way Emebet still thinks and acts. Her choice of the word "*tagay*", as opposed to other words such as "*teramadge*"[29] (suggested by other activists), for example, reveals that, for her, working on gender/women's issues is still a challenge for women in today's Ethiopia and that women still have to struggle to achieve equality with men and take their rightful place in society.

Sehin

Sehin is a gender expert who was recommended to me as an Oromo gender activist[30] with long experience of women's issues. While the former information on her ethnic origin was inaccurate, the latter was correct as, to

[29] Again the loose translation could be a person who is attached to a "socialist" type of progress thus connotes a revolutionary characteristic of the activist.

[30] I saw her for the first time in 2004/2005 while she was presenting her research paper on Ethiopian women and leadership. At the time I had recently returned to Ethiopia after 15 years abroad. As most of the participants of the workshop had received her recommendations prior to the meeting, discussion was focused on the recommendations. Although I did not give my view at the time, I remember thinking that the problems of Ethiopian women in accessing leadership positions seemed similar to those of women in the developed world.

my surprise, she told me that she was at one point a high-ranking cadre of the Derg regime, thus a former member of the Derg's party. Sehin grew up in Welega, part of the Oromia region. She grew up in the Oromo culture and spoke the language fluently. "That is what caused the mistake," Sehin argues, and she adds that "nonetheless, you could say I am an Oromo woman".

> Then I became a gender "back-stopper" for a fostering project. A gender back-stopper is a gender expert who advises on how gender considerations can be included in projects – you could say, a technical advisor who oversees things and makes recommendations. At one point I felt that everything I was doing was trivialized. To do a gender analysis in a tent in the middle of nowhere is not easy. I was not taken seriously, and my comments were not well received. They made fun of what you did – I could not stand that. So I quit a well-paying job, with one week's paid vacation every month, and it was good money for the time.
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> After that, I started to do freelance consultancy. Subsequently, I got a consultancy job in a project entitled "Gender and Law" in Oromia, which ended up being the job experience that gave me the best personal satisfaction of my entire life. The work consisted of creating legal awareness, a legal literacy programme, if you like. It was a project that involved the community – they had the opportunity to revise their way of doing things and their scheme of by-laws, think about plans and new structures, etc. I worked for this project for four and a half years. One indication of the success of that programme is that one person we worked with is a minister now. Her name is Demitu; if you talk to her she can tell you more.
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> However, what is sad about these projects is that, sometimes, they just stop them like that, with no closure. We were planning to work with a Muslim-dominant community. The project was to be funded by the Germans; they just stopped it with no closure. It becomes tiring at some points; you become frustrated. While still working there, though, I went into serious politics. During the launch of this German-funded project I met someone who impressed me, with whom I started to have some discussions. After a few discussions, we decided to start up a new political party, the Ethiopian Democratic League (EDL). Nevertheless, we were too marginal, too small. It is very difficult to establish and run a political party.

In this section, Sehin describes three facets of her profile: a gender back-stopper, a freelance consultant and a politician. She also reveals how she felt and lived during these three different experiences. In her role as a gender back-stopper, similarly to both Kalkidan and Rahel, she encountered

a certain kind of resistance from her colleagues, which she found intolerable. In the second experience, which also focuses on gender, it is the actions of some of the donor agencies that she criticizes and finds frustrating. Lastly, she decides to participate in the political process and observes the challenge of establishing a new political party in Ethiopia[31] today. In fact, Sehin was a politician in what looks like another lifetime. Sehin participated in the student movement when she was in high school. Like many young people of her time, she was also imprisoned and tortured during the Red Terror period. However, after some political education during her stay in prison, she later became a prominent figure among women cadres recruited by the Derg.

Admas

Admas is a former student movement activist and former member of EPRP. She occupies a leadership position in an international NGO dedicated to women's reproductive health and rights. The main goal of this international non-governmental organization (INGO) is to reduce the death of women from unsafe abortions in particular and to promote women's control of their sexual and reproductive rights in general.

> When we talk about abortion or contraception we continue to put it within the family planning framework; more specifically, we call it comprehensive contraception. But out of habit we continue to refer to it as family planning. You see, contraception started with the introduction of family planning in Ethiopia, because it was designed for married women, or a married couple only, if you like. For some reason we don't seem to have got out of this framework, we are kind of stuck with this term. Otherwise, we work by integrating the two components because we want to avoid repeat abortions. And we want to avoid women resorting to abortion in the first place. We try to sensitize and educate people with our outreach programmes, going to different places. The problem is that the Ministry of Health (MoH) says "don't talk about it, just deliver the services". But if you don't inform people they cannot come to get the services. So we design the information within what we call health education programmes. What is the purpose of setting up services if people don't make use of them? At the end of the day, they have to have information if you want them to come and get the services; this is our major challenge.

[31] This occurred before the 2005 election. In fact, her party merged with the main opposition party for the 2005 election, which it lost; the highly contested results provoked some violence and the death of more than 200 demonstrators.

> Nevertheless, we still talk about it around education centres like high schools and universities. In high schools we collaborate with some community-based organizations [CBOs], because we cannot be everywhere. Hence, we give some guidance to CBOs – it's about helping them to integrate some component of abortion/contraception in their programme, whether they work on HIV, the eradication of early marriage, etc. … depending on what they are working on, we try to technically assist them in educating, sensitizing and mobilizing. Therefore, we work with school-based organizations, out of school, or there are these new reproductive health organizations established by the MoH; we try to assist them to be functional. It is full of challenges but it is very interesting.

In this extract, Admas exposes what they do but also the difficulties they encounter. Two specific challenges seem to emerge from this extract. The first is the use of the term "family planning". She draws a distinction between what is traditionally called family planning in Ethiopia and the comprehensive contraception plan they are promoting. She also describes how the embeddedness of the term family planning in the Ethiopian context affects the way they deliver their message. Clearly, their focus is not family planning but, rather, providing women with access to reproductive healthcare and, ultimately, control over their sexual/reproductive rights. Hence, they are not only dealing with women's reproductive healthcare but also with women's control of their bodies. Nonetheless, two implicit strategies seem to emerge. Understandably, the fact that they continue to use the family planning packaging to deliver their programme could be seen as a preventive measure to avoid opposition. Second, this connection with family planning makes their programme a health-related one rather than one related to (women's) rights and thus makes it more acceptable to society. This seems to advocate a more pragmatic approach to get results. Moreover, it appears that the same reasoning – of the value of not rocking the boat too much – motivates the MoH's suggestion to concentrate on the provision of services rather than the dissemination of information. The MoH is one of the main partners of Admas's organization. In 2005, Ethiopia ratified its abortion law and eased some of its restrictions. In this context, it is not surprising that both experiences –that of the INGO and the MoH –seem to reveal a certain uneasiness surrounding the issue of abortion and contraception, as well as the conservative tendencies of the society in which they operate.

Fawsia

Fawsia is a founding member of EWLA and heads an NGO that provides shelter and other comprehensive support mechanisms to battered women. Fawsia, who is the only Muslim activist of this research, received her primary and lower secondary education (grades 7 and 8 in the Ethiopian system of education) in a Catholic private school. She went to the Etege Menen Secondary School, where she became an active member of the YMCA.

> At the time I gave legal aid at EWLA and everybody knew that Mondays were my days, and it was a busy day. Most of the time, your work does not end after providing the legal aid service. You also have to deal with women who would ask you, where do I go now, what will I eat? I am running away from a battering husband, where do I go with my children? At the beginning we had no option but to raise money from all the staff at EWLA to deal with these expenses. Once we understood that there was this gap, we started budgeting for what we called a victims' fund to cover these not-so-unexpected expenses.
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> Then there was this incident aired on the news about a young child who died after being raped in Dire Dawa. That prompted us to organize a campaign against violence committed against women. Women like Dr Kongit, Haregoin, Aster, Birke, who were there from the founding of EWLA, joined the EWLA group, and the campaign grew and became a six-month project culminating in a successful demonstration. At that time the criminal code was not reformed, so we dropped off our petition both at the parliament and the Prime Minister's Office. After the demonstration, we held a three-day candlelight vigil at Meskel Square. We made sure that all our activities got radio and television coverage to alert the public.
>
> By the end of the campaign, we came to the realization that EWLA could not be active on all fronts: we needed to establish other organizations to complement EWLA's achievements. After some meetings we came up with the idea of creating a shelter for victims of violence … until 2005 we could not find a donor to fund the project. They were more willing to fund advocacy and public education programmes, which we did until we finally got a small fund through the assistance of a colleague who worked with the Oak Foundation at the end of 2005. After funding problems, the second challenge was getting a house; people did not want to rent their property to us. Finally, a woman agreed to lease us a house and we started our safe house with six battered women. Currently, we have capacity to accommodate 50 victims in each of our locations, in Addis and Adama. In fact, we had to accept close to 100 people in each, because we don't only have women. When you say women, they come with their children, you cannot turn them away. You also have expectant mothers, who end up having their child there.

> That prompted us to widen our services; we said why not give them some training so that they learn some skills that will enable them to join the workforce and be financially empowered when they leave the shelter. So we started IGA [income-generating activities] training to facilitate their reintegration back into society. Furthermore, we continue to give public education workshops to law enforcement agents and women's affairs employees. We are active in six high schools and give some training to both students and teachers.

In this extract, Fawsia tells the story of the women's sanctuary that she heads. She tells us how they (she and her colleagues at EWLA) had come to identify a need while practising their daily legal aid service. Some of the poor women who came for legal aid were indeed afraid to go back to their homes. Hence, they tried to offer temporary solutions by contributing from their own pockets and then creating the victims' fund. Nonetheless, they realized that the problem needed to be addressed in a comprehensive way. But it was a tragedy that transcended all others that catalysed a campaign and made them realize they needed to find a sustainable solution. Given the magnitude of the problem, the establishment of one, or even several, organizations was far from enough.

In this extract, Fawsia exposes the reality of many Ethiopian women visiting EWLA: extreme poverty and prevalence of domestic violence. As seen above with Lemlem's testimony, in addition to providing free legal aid services to poor women in general, EWLA's mission is to improve the legal, political and social conditions of women in Ethiopia, and thus it focuses on improving women's strategic gender needs. Fawsia's testimony introduces the dilemma that women activists in poor countries are confronted with every day: reconciling basic gender needs and strategic gender needs.

Revolutionaries in the TPLF guerrilla struggles

Tesfa

Tesfa is an emblematic figure in TPLF's history. She is one of the first women whose name has been associated with TPLF since its early days. At one time, she was the first woman guerrilla fighter to become a member of its central committee. She has occupied high official positions at both regional and national levels after the downfall of the Derg, during the transitional EPRDF government. She left the government and her party

during the division that occurred within TPLF in 2001. She was a member of the Arena Tigray Party, which is also one of the eight parties that formed the "Medrek" coalition. At the 2010 election, she was the first candidate to run against PM Meles Zenawi. She lost the election but continues to be politically active.

> TPLF's programme was visionary, we joined because we believed in and were ready to die for our cause. But what I learned from my 17 years of experience within this organization is that mistakes were not corrected in time. Of course, we need to take into account the nature of our society and of our culture, the location of our combatants and their educational and social background. As opposed to that, we had a strong and committed leadership, with a good strategy and plan that led us to victory.
>
> Therefore, I think people just saw our successes and not our weaknesses. Our victory hid some of our undemocratic practices. For example, we had a problem back then in 1969 [Ethiopian calendar][32] – we called it *"enfishfish*". We solved it by criticizing and imprisoning our comrades, there was no free discussion, no transparency in the way we dealt with the problem. We had established the tendency that problems would be solved as we went along, "*be hidet yefetal*", and we never got around to that. We did not develop a political culture of self-criticism; instead, we had developed one of fear, respect and adulation of the leadership. We had confidence, too much confidence, in the leadership's decision-making capacities. Consequently, we slowly gave up our power to contribute to the decision-making process.

In this extract, Tesfa exposes the essence of her frame of mind during the interview. She lets us see her pride in having participated in this extraordinary struggle, which was not smooth, with its up and downs. In fact, she tries to show us that, despite the victory, there were signs of weakness that were ignored. She seems to suggest that, had mistakes been corrected as they were made, TPLF would have developed principles that could have led to the more democratic running of its organization and activities. In any case, Tesfa is a political activist who has dedicated her life to a cause. In this short extract she reveals a woman of conviction, who has reflected on her engagement, actions and responsibilities to the people she vowed to serve.

[32] The Ethiopian calendar, which follows the ancient Julian calendar, is seven years and eight months behind the Gregorian (Western) calendar.

The following two extracts come from an interview conducted with two former TPLF combatants. Due to time constraints, an agreement was made to interview the two participants together in the office of a common acquaintance. A former member of EPDM, who played the role of the gatekeeper rather than being a participant herself, recommended them. The interview, which lasted approximately three and a half hours, was interesting, and the interaction of the three people (that is, including me) gave it another dynamic. The two participants listening while the other was speaking sometimes remembered incidents that they had forgotten and went back to the event and told their version, or they would just say "You asked her this, and I have a story about that" and would then tell their story, in such a way that they built on each other's narratives without being repetitious, covering the events themselves but also disclosing anything they thought would be relevant to make a point or complete the coherence of the narrative.

Aklile

Aklile is a high-ranking officer of the FDRE army and a former TPLF combatant. In this extract, Aklile reflects on her military career within TPLF. Not only does she trace her trajectory as a guerrilla fighter, but she also reveals who she is and where she comes from by giving us information about her social and educational background, which implicitly unravels the extent of her personal achievement and those of others from the same background. She describes the progress of her academic and military training. She continues by depicting the characteristics of a military leader:

> I joined TPLF in 1972 [Ethiopian calendar – 1979 in the Gregorian calendar] … about a little more than a year and a half later, I became a group leader (of three combatants), then I moved on to being a team leader, a *ganta* leader, a *Hail* leader, a *shaleka* or regiment leader and finally a brigade leader … Each post has different responsibilities, in terms of material and human resources [HR] mobilization and organization … if you are on the front you know what your duty is, and when you are not on the front fighting, you have to keep up the physical exercises, continue the capacity building of your team or brigade, with both the military and political training. You always have to be mentally and physically ready for the strenuous and unpredictable military life. Anyway, my motto was, no matter what my position was, whether a team leader or a brigade leader, one of my priorities was making sure that I did not make a mistake and

preventing anything bad happening to my team, because the cost of a simple mistake was so high.

As you know, most of us are *yegebere ledjotch nen*[33] [children of farmers] so we did not have the opportunity to go to school. When I joined TPLF, I was uneducated. Therefore, we were taught to read and write after we joined the armed struggle. We wrote on a *biretmidad*, which served both as a cooking pan and a blackboard. In addition to the military training TPLF-run schools, I attended classes at Mayday[34] and had reached grade 2 when we had to stop and return to the front as the Derg launched a strong offensive against our forces … Nevertheless, at the time, we were getting continuous training and instruction in everything. Even though we started off as illiterate peasants, we were thriving, committed and engaged in what we were doing, so we learned fast and well. We were taught military science, it sounds complicated now but it was not at that time. We studied night and day; we repeated our lessons in our minds during our long walks. We also had demonstration sessions or practical experiences, where we demonstrated our knowledge of what we had learned.

I was not the only combatant from a peasant background who had reached a leadership position; a lot of men with the same background did the same. We were committed to our cause, and we were ready to give our life for the struggle. That was not enough – you had to be courageous, and strong, both mentally and physically. You had to be decisive, be impartial, and all this you learned from your superiors, or the members of the leadership of the organization. It was not about theoretical education, it was practical, and every day was a learning opportunity. If you had good leadership, you progressed accordingly.

Of course, you are confronted with challenges, a lot of challenges, getting injured is a challenge, and you can easily be injured. I was wounded five times. It is painful, but sometimes you don't even wait until the injury is completely healed, you escape and join your fighting unit. When I talk about this now, it sounds like I am telling a fictitious story. Even *I* feel like I am telling a made-up story. Anyway, when you are faced with a challenge, you have to make a decision and find a solution within a second. That is the nature of the context and the struggle.

Above, we are told about the military organization's training and discipline within TPLF. We are told the social and educational background of the

[33] This expression was a recurring term used throughout Aklile's narrative; in the first three minutes of the interview, she reiterated this expression six times in its different forms, including "*end manignawoom yegebere ledje*" and "*end manignawoom ye gueter lidje*". While "*ye guebere lidje*" literarily means a farmer's/cultivator's child, loosely translated it means "like any person coming from a peasant background or coming from rural Ethiopia".

[34] "Mayday" and "March 8" were two schools where TPLF guerrilla fighters were given basic education.

majority of TPLF's membership, and how gaps in terms of education or military training were being filled. Moreover, we learn about the guerrilla fighters' commitment and engagement to the organization, and the deep respect for the leadership. In fact, the first impression is that Aklile is just a high-ranking officer like any other, who just happens to be a woman. Except for the single sentence where she confirms that she was not an exception, compared to men fighters with the same background, any male guerrilla fighter could have reiterated this extract. It seems that, for her, if there had been an impediment to her military career, this would have been class rather than gender. The question for me concerned to what extent her military discipline had an effect on what she chose to reveal or not. Interestingly, another story within her narrative (discussed in chapter eight) reveals that women's resistance to patriarchy has always been part of Tigrayan women's history.

Woode

Woode is a former TPLF guerrilla fighter and at the time of the interview she occupied a leadership position in one of the ministries. She was also in charge of the gender issues of the organization.

> During the demobilization process, I felt that the restructuring affected or focused more on women soldiers. That was the moment we realized that our lack of education had significant consequences in our personal and professional life and would eventually work against us [women guerrilla fighters]. Most of us were uneducated. In peacetime, we necessarily needed educated people to reconstruct the country. Thus, some of the men fighters, but more of the female fighters, particularly those of us who were active combatants [*serawit yebernew*], did not have other skills to fall back on – our profession was to fight. It was in this context we found ourselves demobilized or discharged from our responsibilities. Of course, we were against it. However, we had to accept it because the decision came from the leaders of the organization. I was also among those who were demobilized.
>
> As I told you before, my education level at the time was that of a fourth grader. We were encouraged to go back to school; more specifically, those of us who had leadership roles in the army were sent back to school. I got into the fifth grade as I was a good student, and I was able to skip classes and complete grade 12 more rapidly. By 1992 [Ethiopian calendar] we were no longer army officers, we were civilians working in some of the ministries. I had become just an

> ordinary civil servant with no managerial/leadership responsibilities. Of course, with only a twelfth-grade education, I knew I could not hope for a promotion. Therefore, I decided to continue my education. Luckily, my bosses allowed me to take some time off to get a diploma in accounting. However, I did not stop with the diploma; I continued my journey in higher education and got a degree in management … I just knew, deep down, that the key to success was education. But first, I had to convince myself that I could do it. I said to myself, I have done it before, I have been a good guerrilla fighter, and I owe it to my female comrades and myself. I will prove that that I can succeed academically. Not only for me but also for my friends who have given up. The message was to show them that the solution was to get an education.
>
> Later on, after a few years of work experience and after a few promotions, I was able to catch up with my former comrades who stayed in the army. I have now reached a leadership position as [removed for anonymity].[35] Hence, I am a civilian, unlike Aklile, who is a high-ranking officer. So you can say that I have spent the last few years of my life finishing school, having children, taking care of them and advancing my career while my husband, who has remained in the army, is still on the front.

At the end of the war, immediately after TPLF/EPRDF took power, its army concentrated on the peacekeeping and stabilization process. Once that was done, the time came for demobilization, followed by the reconstruction of the regular Ethiopian army, which took into consideration the question of ethnic representation. As a result, TPLF, which proudly promoted the participation of women in the struggle and claimed that women made up 30% of its armed forces, had to cut down on its army in order to accommodate the new members of other ethnic groups to form the future Ethiopian army. In the process, more than four thousand TPLF women guerrilla fighters had to be sent home. As was the case for TPLF men combatants, the few women combatants who had escaped demobilization to stay in the army were demoted. That was what happened to Aklile, who was able to stay in the army but who was downgraded two levels. Thus, while the policy took into consideration the ethnic factor, once again the gender factor was relegated to a secondary position or not considered at all.

As a result of demobilization, many of the female guerrilla fighters, including Woode, found themselves out of a job, fending for their individual lives. In

[35] I have taken out the title of her occupation to preserve her anonymity.

fact, both Aklile and Woode, like many of their comrades, were only teenagers when they joined the army. Hence, the only life they had known since leaving their families was that of the armed struggle, where they did not have to deal with the pressures of normal life. During the war years, the guerrilla fighters went through what McAdam (1989: 745) has called the conversion process. In other words, they were members of an organized revolutionary group involved in what he identified as high-risk/cost activism. They lived and fought together, surviving a 17-year war against the much more highly militarized army of the Derg. Here is what Woode has to say about the way of life of the armed struggle and the challenges of switching back to normal life:

> Things have changed now. The reality was different then. Today we no longer live in community among combatants. After the war, we had to integrate into society, where there were a lot of educated people who knew what they were doing. That's how and why some of us went back to school. These are the kinds of challenges we had to face after winning the war. To start a new life was very difficult – it was a nightmare [*tchelema gize neber*]. Switching back to civilian life meant taking care of yourself, getting an income, paying your bills (water, electricity) – all this was new to us. Managing your household was a challenge. We had lived in a community. We never had to worry about clothes, food and shelter. That was taken care of by the organization. Leading a new life, learning a new way of life, starting from zero, was very tough.

Therefore, after the victory and demobilization, going back to normal life meant learning a new way of life, in which they had to unlearn the experience of communal life and learn to take care of themselves. Woode's testimony seems to indicate that, although demobilization affected both men and women fighters, the process particularly affected women fighters as the majority were less educated and thus felt less suited to organizing themselves and making the leap into civilian life. In fact, although both our participants had the opportunity to continue their education and realize the potential for a better life, they seem to represent the exception rather than the majority of women guerrilla fighters. Woode highlights this fact when she says that she wanted to show her comrades that it was possible to start over by going back to school and getting education. She wanted to be an example for her friends, who she felt had given up. She also explains that the process

was not easy even for her, that she had to motivate herself, reminding herself that she had achieved a great deal as a guerrilla fighter and that going back to school and starting a new life could not be harder than that. Even though education was proposed as the best way to achieve success, Woode completed the process of integration into a normal social life by starting a family of her own to conform to one of the traditional institutions organizing social life.

The negotiators

This group of women includes founders and executive directors of NGOs, professional women activists working in, or closely with, NGOs, and professional women working in various fields, involved in philanthropic activism and/or identified as activists by their peers.

Dinknesh

Dinknesh is the founder and executive director of an Ethiopian resident NGO, located outside Addis Ababa. In 1997, Dinknesh, a graduate student in the United States, decided to return to her native land and founded her organization. A victim of FGM herself, rather than remaining in the United States and working towards the eradication of this violence committed against women, she made the conscious decision to return home.

> So it's a matter of choice. Especially when you reach a certain stage and you grow up and come to a crossroads. For me my crossroads … [pause] I always wanted to do something to improve the life of my kind in the village, but the crossroads arrived when I was in graduate school and things were happening in my country. Should I have just continued in leading an American life, and help from there, or go back to the roots of the problem, learn from them, listen to them, work with them, bring about the change designed by them, because it is not my design. However, I knew what my wish was:
>
> They would not be beaten. Every girl born could go to school. No girl should experience the kinds of things that I have experienced, the kinds of things that my sisters have experienced. No girl! But would they want to? Yes, they do want to take action. How do I know? "Because I am them".

Several issues are highlighted in this short extract. We are talking about an educated woman who could have chosen to continue her journey by prioritizing her career and eventually helping her community in a different

way from afar. Instead, she chose to return home, and not because she felt that, as an educated person, she could contribute her knowledge to solve what she considered to be the problem, but rather to work with the community based on its local "wisdom". Hence, first and foremost, she recognized local knowledge and capacity for transformation. That entailed being willing and able to listen, learn and eventually design, with the community, a more just and fairer world for women, based on the principle of "equality, equity and redeemed personhood".

She clarifies what motivates her to do this and the issues that drive her. Then she discloses the connection she has with others who have been through the same experiences as she has, women she calls "my sisters", creating a sense of solidarity. Thus, we can observe a process of double identification, "strong identification with and commitment to a cause", that of redeeming women's personhood with a special focus on the elimination of FGM, and identification with her fellow victims of FGM. The following extract illustrates Dinknesh's commitment and practice as she contextualizes and expands on what her engagement is about:

> To come back to what Ethiopian feminism is,[36] for me it is not just about filling gaps. It is not limited to allowing us to participate in politics, or allowing us to become doctors, it is about allowing us to be, to be who we are. We are full, we are whole, and we should not be mutilated. It is about allowing us to be human beings.
>
> So that takes many steps. What does it entail, what does it take? Of course, it takes filling gaps but also addressing violence. We are violated in everything. I am working on eliminating female genital mutilation. On our celebration of our first five years, we came out to celebrate the uncut girls. I don't like to use the word "cut" but I don't know what else I can say. We had about thirty-five thousand uncircumcised girls registered; we wanted to celebrate, not only us but also the community wanted to celebrate the achievement. We called the celebration "Whole body, healthy life, and freedom from FGM".
>
> Freedom from genital mutilation and the date set for the celebration was coincided with the period when, formerly, circumcised girls or survivors came out, were groomed, fed, well dressed – showing off,

[36] In the interview schedule, there were questions related to feminism, how the participant would define feminism, and whether and how feminist consciousness is manifested in Ethiopia. What feminism is will be examined later, as the theme will be explored mainly in the chapter eight.

> you know, that now they have become women, that they were ready for marriage. Taking away the very thing that makes them be and feel like a woman was a cause for celebration then. So we needed to replace that. That is what we did and we called that the celebration period – “Whole body, healthy life, and freedom from FGM day”. Only now, we celebrated the uncircumcised girls. Today I call it freedom from violence because you know FGM is part of the violence against women.

Dinknesh starts by contextualizing her definition of feminism in the Ethiopian situation. Overall, in this extract, she seems to suggest that there is no contradiction between advocating the participation of women in the public sector, hence giving women the opportunity to become accomplished professionals, and fighting against the violence committed against women – in this case, working for the elimination of FGM. However, it is clear where her own focus and priorities are: working towards the eradication of FGM, by dismantling the cultural practices that support it. She illustrates this process with the example she provides. The period she and the community chose for the campaign celebrating “Whole body, healthy life, and freedom from FGM” was the same period in which the community previously celebrated the rite of passage of the excised (mutilated) young girls in the community. This rite of passage, a cultural practice that had significant implications for the local way of life, was organized in that community. It marked the time that young women become available for marriage. Dinknesh, who is aware of the symbolic values of cultural practices, did not believe in but also did not try to get rid of this rite. Instead, she opted to transform it, by making use of the same rite to express a new phenomenon, that of celebrating uncut girls. In this sense, she shows us how she was able to work and bring about change without rejecting the whole cultural system.

Finally, this extract shows the evolution of Dinknesh’s engagement. Indeed, her focus is the elimination of FGM, but she never lost sight of the bigger issue of violence committed against women. In her narrative, she employs a zooming-in-and-out effect, making sure that in the process we don’t lose sight of the injustices committed against all women.

Almaze

Almaze is the founder of and executive director of an NGO working on the economic empowerment of underprivileged urban women. She was recommended to me by several of the activists I had interviewed. While working for EWLA, I had heard her and the members of her organization mentioned by those who participated in the 2001 protest march against domestic violence, which was organized by EWLA in collaboration with the other women's organizations.

> So far, for the last 17 years, I never felt, nor do I feel, the urge to look for a better job with better financial benefits. Remember the other two local NGOs founded by male colleagues, they have both moved to other, bigger, international NGOs. I am happy, and the fact I am still here, first it has given the organization the opportunity to grow, and second it has enabled the organization to achieve visible results related to women's everyday lives.
>
> Before the new NGO law [the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation] was adopted, we used to conduct a lot of campaigns. We organized activities on gender-based violence on different occasions, such as the 15 days of activism that occurred in November, and participated in demonstrations against rape or any violence committed against women. We attended court debates to put pressure on the judiciary system, which tended to minimize the crimes committed against women. We closely followed tax-related policies that were disadvantageous to poor women.
>
> But since the new NGO law does not allow internationally funded NGOs to work on issues related to rights and advocacy, our work as we knew it has stopped. However, something I have noticed and learned is that if you support women to be economically empowered, they manage to find a way to have their other rights (social or political rights) respected. Hence, that confirms my belief/conviction that the entry point is economic power. If you take, for example, a married woman whose husband is the provider of the household, with a decent income, the fact that she does not generate income makes her less assertive with regard to her rights compared to a poor woman who has some economic independence. She knows that something is missing. But the moment she contributes to the household, she starts saying, I do exist, I have rights. So this is what we are doing now.

Several issues emerge in this extract. In the first paragraph, Almaze focuses on how she feels and why. She tells us that she is happy and still committed to her organization. In order to highlight her point, she uses a comparison. The organization she works for was founded in 1997 with the financial support of Action Aid Ethiopia, along with two other NGOs led by men. She

seems to suggest that the men who founded the other two NGOs were more interested in improving their careers, while she chose to remain and contribute to the growth of her organization. The implication is that personal satisfaction, rather than financial or material benefits, was more important to her. Effectively, the theme of the happiness and satisfaction she gets from her engagement with her organization and the cause it stands for is emphasized, as it is repeatedly put forward in her narrative.

Then we come across the following periodization: “before” and “after” the new NGO law, as mentioned several times in her narrative and the narratives of the other interviewees. The implication is that, although resident NGOs such as Almaze’s were focused on the economic empowerment of women, they were engaged in performing a comprehensive type of activism – that is, they were also involved in the promotion and advocacy of women’s rights. Therefore, in addition to providing individual women with technical support for their small business entrepreneurship, they were also able to openly raise women’s political and gender consciousness through their training and public education programmes. Since the new NGO law has been in place, women in development-oriented organizations that chose to register as Ethiopian resident NGOs have had to abide by the law and leave the promotion of rights issues in general, and advocacy work on women’s rights in particular, to NGOs accredited as local/Ethiopian NGOs.

The last paragraph of the extract focuses on the principal mission of Almaze’s organization: the economic empowerment of women. Almaze is one of the few activists interviewed who has clearly indicated that she can be called a feminist (feminism will be discussed later in the thesis), hence her conviction that it is the entry point for women’s emancipation. She illustrates her point with the comparison of the “good and docile” housewife and the financially independent poor woman. Although her example is too simplistic and gives a reductive/reducing image of the housewife, it reveals a certain reality of how some financially dependent women feel and/or are portrayed in society. Almaze’s narrative exposes her perception, which is based on the experiences of women members of her organization.

Gidey

Gidey[37] is the founder and executive director of an Ethiopian resident NGO. Not only is Gidey an advocate for the social, political and economic empowerment of women, but her NGO promotes and monitors children's rights in general, and in relation to child labour in particular.

> So, one morning, two of them [the yellow girls][38] came and said, "Gidey, there is an old man. He is a bedridden man. So every night a mouse comes and eats bits of his ear." "How come?" I asked. "What do you mean?" "How come this happens to a human being?" "Why don't you come and see?" they said. "He does not have anyone to take care of him. He does not have any family. Once in a while a neighbour will come and feed him."
>
> I said, "I will not come, we don't have funds for the elderly people, and all the funds are allocated, yeah? If they are for construction purposes, they are for construction because donors are not that flexible. They may be flexible on other things, but not on moving funds from one programme to another."
>
> So a mouse eats someone's ear, I will not go to see this but I will go somewhere to … get a credit. I don't know how God guided me there but I went directly to the CRDA,[39] you know CRDA? It's an umbrella organization – at that time they had a relief programme. So I went to one of the bosses and told him the story. "Gidey I do not have a budget for it, what about if we give you flour, oil, milk powder, food utensils and blankets, etc.?"
>
> The next day they gave me everything. I just said that we do not have the personnel to do this. So I went to see our construction programme head, and asked him to give me about four women from the daily labourers, he said okay so I brought those women with me. We had a big building for the children's programme and we had a big kitchen used for a feeding programme for children with learning difficulties and

[37] I interviewed Gidey in 2008, when Dr Alice Butterfield asked me to conduct an interview for a chapter in the book *Women in social work who have changed the world*. After discussing the aim of the chapter with her, I agreed to do the interview. I prepared the interview schedule and conducted the interview, which was tape-recorded. I then transcribed it and wrote the first version of the narrative. This extract is taken from the transcription of her life story. I conducted a second interview with her in August 2014 to update and complete the narrative.

[38] Two of the yellow girls – a group of young girls who had finished high school – were trained to become volunteer grassroots workers. "We called them 'yellow girls' because they usually dress in yellow gowns. All were females, because culturally males were not welcomed in the households to work … to teach mothers especially … So my first work was with these 30 young women and I trained them in a way [as what we would now call case managers] – really, they were the best. One evaluator came from Sweden and said 'How did you train these people? They are even better than the professionals'" (Butterfield and Abye 2010: 118).

[39] Christian Relief and Development Association (Ethiopia).

> the KG programme … Okay, we have this *dabe*, you know *dabe*, it is a bread, like *kita, ye bete Christian yemikeber* [bread that can be offered to the church]. One *dabe* can be divided and distributed to different people.
>
> Then I asked the grassroots staff to make me a list of all the bedridden elderly people in the area as well as those who are okay and can move around. I told them to bring it to me within an hour, which they did because they themselves come from the community of 150 households in the area, they know the people by name, by place, by kebele, by house number – they know everything. We had two groups of elderly people we wanted to support, those who are bedridden and those who can move but are poor and without support. Now we had a structure and people who just needed support and orientation. The idea was to establish a self-support group, Elderly People by Elderly People.
>
> Afterwards, we informed the more able senior citizens about the idea and what they were going to do. We told them "We will give you food for so-and-so and you will be responsible for them. You will distribute food and you will visit them, see him or see her, help them clean up, or assist them to go outside in the sunlight [*wede tsehai lai magelabet*]". Okay, they said, because these elderly people, they were also getting the same benefits. They will get food like them, they will get blankets, and they will get everything. And second, they are always relating their action to their religion and therefore were happy to serve … The structure was monitored by one of the yellow girls, supported by a volunteer medical doctor who comes to examine them twice a week … meaning this has become better than the projects that have funds. The following year we submitted a proposal to an international organization, a British NGO called HelpAge International, and got the funds to continue the programme.

In this extract Gidey has not yet founded her association; she was employed at the Integrated Holistic Approach – Urban Development Programme (IHA-UDP), where she learned a lot. "This was like a great university for me, I learned so much there," she says. IHA-UDP was founded and led by Dr Jember,[40] whom Gidey identifies as her role model. Not only did Gidey learn with the community she was working with, but she was also sent abroad for

[40] Dr Jember was one of the candidates I wanted to interview as she is an activist whom most of my interviewees look up to; she symbolized a certain kind of activism that some described as social activism. The first time I tried to contact her was in December 2012. I went to her organization and was told that she was out of town. Nevertheless, I met her project manager at the time, with whom I had a discussion; he said to me that he would describe her more as a humanitarian than as an activist. Anyway, I made another attempt to interview her during the summer of 2014 and was sad to learn that she had by then retired and that all the projects of IHA-UDP had been phased out and the organization had closed down. Nevertheless, as Gidey testifies, it remains the case that IHA-UDP was one of the first NGOs providing services using the concept of an "integrated holistic approach".

training programmes and workshops, including to the Netherlands, where she had the opportunity to complete a postgraduate diploma.

Hence, in this extract, Gidey held the position of a community development (expert) programme coordinator, which allowed her to be involved in many of IHA-UDP's programmes, including the coordination of the health, construction and income-generation programmes. However, the problem that was presented to her by the yellow girls is extraordinary. At first, her reaction was one of disbelief, to the point that the grassroots workers suggested she go and see for herself, which she did not. Then, when she decided to act, she did not react emotionally and assist this person individually by raising enough money for his immediate needs. Instead, she looked at the situation logically and set out to find a sustainable solution that could benefit everyone who might find herself/himself in a similar situation. Thus, all that was required was Gidey engaging in some creative thinking about how to mobilize people and organizations in order to get all the necessary materials, like food, staff, blankets, mattresses, etc., and setting up the assistance programme she describes, which was called Elderly People by Elderly People and which ended up as a successful project capable of drawing in funding. Moreover, like Dinknesh, Gidey's concept recognizes and relies on the community's ability to come together to solve its own problems. As she admits herself, the programme was successful because the more able elderly people, who were also receivers of support, related more to their peers and were happy to give back to the community. Moreover, we see a reference to religion to justify this willingness to help.

The second point that should be underlined in this extract is the context in which the women activists evolved and the diverse type of challenges they are confronted with in their everyday activity. As in Fawsia's narrative, too often they come across situations where the basic needs and dignity of their fellow citizens are far from being fulfilled. Gidey's anecdote illustrates how, for many, it is too difficult even to imagine this reality, let alone conceive of and design a programme to address it. The testimonies of the women activists suggest that too often they have to overstretch their efforts and be

resourceful to deal with these unexpected challenges, which they describe as both strenuous and time-consuming but also satisfying.

Tirunesh

Tirunesh is the executive director of another Ethiopian resident NGO, which has applied a holistic integrated approach.

> I took care of my brother for 20 years. Luckily, despite his disability he could move around with a wheelchair. He was educated and was the head of a department in the Institute of Water Resources. We had to bring all the medical stuff he needed, like urinal bags and so forth, from abroad, from England. So people and relatives used to take pity on me. They used to say that I was wasting my life and would end up a spinster, all for the sake of my brother. As for me, I never regretted my choices. First, I did what I did for my brother. After he died, I did it for my country. And if you ask me how – as you know, Ethiopia has been struck by drought and famine frequently in the last few decades, which allowed me to go and work in different regions of the country, in the north and once even in Welaytta. When there wasn't drought there were epidemics, such as cholera, sometimes even in desert areas like Afar. So I went all over Ethiopia, working, and in these situations children are the first victims. I don't mind working 24 hours to save the lives of children. Somehow in all these cases I found myself being assigned the position of the project manager. I think that was because of my total commitment to what I do. I was not working to get paid – even when I worked as a nurse it was never about the money but the service.
>
> In 1986 I joined Save the Children Norway to work to relieve the impact of the drought on children. Before Save the Children, I worked at the ALERT hospital formerly known as Zenebework Hospital. In fact, when I first graduated from nursing school I was assigned to the ALERT hospital, then had to go to Assab because of the war – all graduated students had to go to the front to take care of wounded soldiers for one year. So when I came back to ALERT I was touched by the stigma that surrounded people suffering from leprosy. And I am a person easily touched by people. I listen to them with empathy and feel their sadness and distress.
>
> After Save the Children Norway … in 1993 I worked for a rehabilitation programme not far from the ALERT hospital. The programme consisted of rehabilitating people living with leprosy, and more particularly children living with this illness, who faced a lot of challenges – you have the illness itself with all its stigmatization, which is a big challenge, and then you have the issue of poverty. In the programme, we built schools and handed them over to the Ministry of Education, established clinics with vaccination programmes, and family planning programmes for mothers, and houses for leprosy victims with children. The unique thing about that work is that the

> people who came there were mostly people migrating from rural areas because of their leprosy. They settled in that area to be close to the hospital.
>
> The other factor is that people's expectation of the migration from rural Ethiopia to Addis Ababa was similar to the actual image people have about emigrating to the US, as if gold rains in Addis.[41] Therefore, a lot of girls aged 12 and above find themselves alone in Addis. That is how young and illiterate girls coming to Addis looking for a better life end up working in small local liquor houses around the area. There they are confronted with a lot of abuses; most often they are forced into prostitution. In addition, they have no idea about the HIV virus. Once they have contracted the virus and start losing weight, the people they work for throw them out. I have witnessed this a lot of times. You see, one time a mother who died of AIDS was covered with flies because no one wanted to touch her, let alone bury her. Of course no one wanted to take her baby either. When you see this you start asking questions about the meaning of life and humanity. When I worked at Save the Children Norway, I had a good salary with a lot of benefits; I was not married and had no children. Seeing all this made me wonder what else I could do in this situation. I wanted to give more, to have peace of mind and at the same time please my God. I wanted to do something that procured me some kind of personal satisfaction. I said to myself, as a nurse, I could start by just informing people about the transmission of HIV, and teaching them about simple prevention methods. God will help me; even if He does not I could say I have done my part, as a woman, as an Ethiopian and mostly as a human being. As a human being I should not accept seeing a person's body left like that without a proper burial. That's how I came to decide to found this organization, to help young girls and young women who find themselves in this sad situation.

In this long extract, sister Tirunesh traces her long journey into activism. In fact, she does not declare herself to be an activist but neither does she deny it. Nevertheless, she just tells her story, revealing the way different factors and events put her on this path, her personal values, her driving principles and her actions. In this extract, Tirunesh covers the approximately 20 years that preceded the founding of her NGO in 1997.

"I took care of my brother for 20 years", she says. Effectively, if we looked at her narrative in its entirety, we could see that her formative years and early adulthood were affected by her brother's disability. Her elder brother, the firstborn of the family, was a happy and outgoing person on whom all the hopes and dreams of the family rested. Unfortunately, early in his teenage

[41] She uses an Ethiopian expression: "Addis Ababa *worke yezenbal yetebalu yemesil*".

years, he was the victim of a car accident that left him paralysed and requiring nursing care and personal assistance in his everyday life. Tirunesh would later name him as the reason she wanted to become a nurse: “I wanted to take care of my brother” she told the committee for selection of nursing students. Hence, her narrative shows that she assigned herself the role of nursing caregiver of her brother; for her, it could not be otherwise. Moreover, she did not depict her brother as a helpless man for whom she sacrificed her personal life; instead, she restores his dignity by highlighting what he achieved despite his disability. She wants to show that he was not a burden to her, and that he was an accomplished man in spite of his medical problems. Finally, she ends her account of her role in her brother’s story by describing her choices in life.

The way she had to defend her choices illustrates the pressure of society on a woman’s life. She is describing what a “normal” woman’s life should be, explaining that people expected her to get married and have children. Even though Tirunesh’s actions and devotion to her brother are respectable, she did not conform to the norm that society required of women in Ethiopia. In fact, her status was merely tolerated rather than accepted. Once her responsibilities to her brother were over, people expected her to conform to the norm by getting married and having children.

But she stands firm on her choices, again justifying her actions and adding to her contributions the services she has rendered to her country and society at large. The repetitive droughts and epidemics are mentioned to demonstrate that her actions were not motivated only by family tragedy. These factors, or more specifically the consequences of these factors, were also a source of her motivation and constituted the driving force of her actions. Moreover, she shows how her interests and her commitment to the marginalized came about and developed out of the personal experiences she had during these formative years, in which she had the opportunity to discover her country and its people. Hence, we have the impression that her life story, or her choices and actions, are intertwined with important events that occurred both in her personal life and nationally. One of the events she mentioned was the drought that occurred in 1984/1985; also, even though she was young at the

time, like anyone who grew up during the emperor's time she remembered or knew about the famine of that occurred a decade earlier, in 1974. Hence, it is clear how Tirunesh's reconstruction of her narrative revealed how her life story is intertwined with the recent history of the country, pointing to what Manning and Cullup-Swan (1994: 474) write: "content and narrative analysis struggle continuously with the problem of context or the embeddedness of text or story within personal or group experience".

The second part of the extract illustrates how the trajectory of her professional life and her activist journey came into collision. Tirunesh tries to give a linear account of her journey into activism by giving us a timeline – for example, "in 1986 I joined Save the Children Norway", and "in 1993 I worked for a rehabilitation programme". But the linearity of the account is disrupted as sometimes she refers to the past in flashbacks to explain the present, and at other times she simply considers the details essential to the construction of her narrative, in this way moving the narrative in time and context. For example, here we are brought back to the period of the full-blown war that Ethiopia was engaged in in its northern territories with the various independent groups involved in guerrilla warfare. Again, embedded in her narrative is the contribution of healthcare professionals in the war but also the authoritarian characteristic of the Derg, which imposed its will on its people.

Ababa

Ababa is the executive director of a local/Ethiopian NGO. Similar to some of the other local/Ethiopian and resident NGOs, its mission is to improve the social, political and economic rights of women. As a local/Ethiopian NGO, Ababa's organization can raise and deal with human rights issues.

> Because I came from a law background, people I looked up to are people like Meaza, Atsedu, Origine, because it was difficult at the beginning, you know. There is a big difference between now and when they started. Now we have precedents the hostility is less visible and there is even some kind of respect. I think when they started out it was difficult confronting people's mindset, and breaking that was a strong move, I think. So now we say, if they did it, then we can do it. They have opened doors for us, because in Ethiopia we don't have a history of activism, at least one that has been written about. I leaned

> about Empress Taytu once I started working in the NGO industry. Maybe because I grew up during the Derg period and we did not talk about activism then. Then, you could not even talk about your neighbour, let alone activists. Individuals did not have a chance during that regime. It was all about the socialist state; you didn't get the opportunity to see or hear about what an individual could accomplish.
>
> I don't remember having a role model in high school or even at university. I remember reading a book and wanting to become that character, because I never had a real one. You know, I decided to become a lawyer after reading Sidney Sheldon's *Rage of angels* [laughter]. That is why we are working on this project on accomplished women now. We grew up without having women to look up to; it was not because we did not have women achievers, it was because nobody presented any for us, so we could not relate to Ethiopian women achievers. Hence, once I became aware of women's issues, I started to see what women face when they resist the norms of society. Ever since I joined this association, I have been to every region and I see women, ordinary women, who have spoken up, strong peasant women who struggle against the beliefs surrounding them. I really admire them. They don't become my models but rather they become my inspiration, my energy. What they do motivates me. You realize that things are happening. I say to myself, somewhere there are other women acting and challenging the system. That makes you feel comradeship, that you are not alone in this struggle. Other women are doing the same thing in different places. You see the same kind of experiences when you travel around other African countries. You come across the same kind of stories, the same kind of challenges, and the same kind of drives. You are amazed when you find these women and immediately relate to them. So these women, if they do not represent the typical role model, they easily become your energy, and make you feel encouraged and say I am on the right track.

As with other women's organizations, the association in which Ababa works is the result of EWLA's successful years. The persons mentioned above, Meaza, Atsedu and Origine, are founding members of EWLA. As lawyers, not only were they Ababa's role models, but most importantly they had become her mentors, as the founders of one of the first women's associations established after the promulgation of the 1994 Constitution of the FDRE. EWLA is most often represented as the association that opened the door to activism for women in Ethiopia.

Moreover, Ababa reminds us that the task that EWLA's founders accomplished was not easy. She reminds us that they had to face many challenges, most particularly that of people's resistance to change, before

they gained acceptance and respect. In this way, she acknowledges both the transformation that occurred and the work that needs to be done.

Although she refers mainly to her own experience, when she affirms that “in Ethiopia we don’t have a history of activism, at least one that has been written about”, this is quite revealing about the general representation of women’s activism in Ethiopia. She states that she learned about the accomplishment of women like Empress Taytu after she joined her association, illustrating the invisibility of Ethiopian women in the history of Ethiopia in general and of activism in particular. She finds her own lack of awareness of this particular history so incredible; she tries to find a sound explanation for it. Rather than posing it as a structural issue emanating from patriarchy, she prefers to hypothesize that it could have been the result of growing up during the Derg period, which emphasized collective action and minimized, not to say erased, individual experiences.

Moreover, she laughs when she admits that her role model was a fictional character; in fact, it is a serious issue for her, because her organization is working actively to correct the invisibility of Ethiopian women role models for the next generation. At the time of this interview (December 2012), they had already set up their website (http://www.ethiopianwomenunleashed.org) and added the short life histories of 60 exemplary women. Today, they have the stories of over 100 women achievers and have also published in Amharic and English a book entitled *Temsalet: phenomenal Ethiopian women*. Moreover, the website indicates that “through the participation of 13 partners, 30,000 copies of the book are being distributed to schools, libraries, girls’ clubs and programmes working on girls’ empowerment across Ethiopia” (NEWA 2014). In this manner, the project tries to correct the above-mentioned invisibility of women in history and also acknowledges their contribution, starting with the historical pioneers and contemporaries, contributing to the recording of their actions. Hence, Ababa’s NGO responds to some concerns shared by other participants such as Emebet, Kalkidan and Rahel.

Last but not least, Ababa talks about two categories of women. The first group, whom she calls her inspirations, comfort her and provide her with reasons to continue her journey. The others are her role models, women whom she would have looked up to while growing up but could not because she was not aware of. They represent the women she or the subsequent generation of women could admire.

Following the interview, Ababa invited me to accompany her to Addis Ababa University where she was invited as a guest speaker and presenter of awards for a programme, organized by the gender office of the university, that honours 12 young women scholars of the year. Each young woman was given a certificate for her achievement and was later offered the chance to tell a short version of her academic journey. During that session, I observed that the majority came from rural, underprivileged backgrounds. Some had to walk long distances to attend school. The difference for them compared with boys was that they had to deal with the risk of abduction and/or rape while travelling, which is a frequent event in most parts of Ethiopia. Others had to live with relatives or the extended family away from home to continue their high school education. Again, this is also true for male students; however, for female students it implied more domestic responsibilities after school. Some of the young women also shared their difficulties after joining the university. They raised issues such as their lack of assertiveness and self-confidence but also harassment from both male students and instructors. All in all, the general impression that emerged from their testimonies was that even finishing high school was an achievement for a female student, let alone going through higher education and getting a diploma.

At the end of the ceremony I met the gender office head and another active member of the organizing committee, with whom I had informal talks, and it was reiterated to me that the focus should be not only on recognizing and celebrating past and present women achievers, but also on acknowledging and encouraging up-and-coming women to become achievers, conscious of their own rights.

Alem

At the time of the interview, Alem was working in an international NGO as an agricultural advisor. I met Alem for the first time at the African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing + 5) in 2004, where she was representing her institution as one of their gender experts. This interview was conducted at Ababa's organization. I sincerely thanked Ababa for inviting me to conduct as many interviews as I needed to in their meeting room/library. Forty minutes into the interview with Alem, Ababa and a male colleague of hers dropped by to say hello. The introduction led to an improvised informal discussion about the meaning of activism, which lasted more than 30 minutes and was tape-recorded. The following is what Alem said about activism before they joined us:

> I am not conventional in many ways; I don't have conventional thinking. For me, activism is when a person takes action for his/her convictions. It's not only about a pool of people going out on the street and demonstrating … In order for that to happen, the context has to go through a process, for you to be able to go out and demonstrate. Therefore, for me individuals believing in what they believe in, and doing what they think should be done and the way it affect their lives … can be considered as activists. They may not consider it that way, but their act has a spiral effect on the rest of the community because they live in a close-knit community.
>
> So it's how that person takes things forward. A while ago, we tried to observe the lives of certain individual women, such as a coffee grower in a rural town. Remember I told you about this woman coffee grower, the hills she has had to climb to be where she is now, for me that is activism. That woman faced many challenges, including being ejected from several committee meetings organized by the coffee growers of her area. Despite that, she managed to mobilize people around her project, and became an award-winning coffee grower. This woman, who went through and survived many daunting situations but managed to excel in it, is an activist for me. In her life, maybe she is not thinking about it that way, but for a person like me who is looking out for certain things she is an activist who has changed the way things were done. When we are on the lookout for change agents, she is there; she is a role model we are all looking for. You know, in a community, which is so male dominated, there are women who can do it, and if she can do it others can follow. You see certain things at community level; you also find them at different levels. It could be within educational institutions, things you observe among students or teachers fighting for certain issues, which are not supported by the majority of … [this is when the interview was interrupted and we were joined by Ababa and her guest].

In this extract, Alem is demonstrating her understanding of what activism means in the Ethiopian context. Right from the start, she clarifies her position, as she places individual and collective action in opposition. She acknowledges the existence of collective activism, which implies the mobilization of a lot of people getting together to demonstrate (for a cause), and she highlights how this type of activism is contingent on context. When she explains that the context has to go through a process, she seems to draw on what structuralists have referred to as resource mobilization and political process perspectives that emphasize structural dispositions. However, she does not expand on the issue; rather, she focuses on individual activism, developing her argument about what she considers activism to be and illustrating her point with the example of the coffee-growing peasant woman who fought the system to become an award-winning coffee grower and in the process also became a role model to her community. In this specific example, Alem describes a certain type of community, a coffee-grower community. Alem specifies “a male-dominated community” – in other words, one where the norm dictates that only men do such kinds of activity. In wanting to become a coffee grower, this woman defies the rules set by the community. She rejects the gender role assigned to her. Consequently, she is confronted with resistance. However, she persists and manages to become not only a coffee grower but also a role model to others, inspiring others to bend gender norms that have confined them to domestic responsibilities.

Hence, this is how Alem recaps and gives a precise definition of what she believes to be activism after Ababa and her guest joined us:

> To summarize for me, it [an activist] is an individual who is able to take some issues forward, without wondering if it is possible or not, but also a person who could serve as a role model for others. It is not necessarily an educated person, but people who were able through their actions to modify the course of their destiny, change their life against floods of opposition and resistance. And in the process they were able to create followers, like for example this woman had lots of followers who would probably go through the same challenges but at least she was capable of building a support system. So if she can do it, she can change the people positively. It can be men or women but she has shown that it is possible. However, we should not be the ones

> who define their success; they are the ones who define their success. So we cannot just sit and measure her success by how many companies she has opened. She is not successful just because she managed to come out of this community. Rather, her success is determined based on what she wanted to achieve or what others were able to see and follow.

It is clear that, as a recurrent figure in Alem's narratives, this woman coffee grower seems to symbolize or represent the spirit of the Ethiopian woman activist. What does that tell us about Alem the gender expert? Alem is a middle-class woman born and raised in Addis Ababa. Similar to Ababa, she attended a girls-only private Catholic school. However, while Ababa went to AAU to continue her higher education, Alem went abroad to India. Both women have similar conceptions of what activism is in general, but differ a little: one emphasizes individual activism, while the other opts for more collective action for the common cause without, however, rejecting the contribution of individual effort/action for a cause. Nonetheless, it is clear that for both activists, this peasant woman coffee grower embodies either a version of what activism could be like in Ethiopia or an inspiration or role model to other agents working to bring about social change.

Yemesserach

Yemesserach is a consultant/gender expert with long experience of working with various organizations at the international, regional, national and local levels. During the Derg period she worked for both ECA and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) where she become aware of and learned about various issues related to women. She is a woman who has known and gone through both the WID and GAD systems. Hence, it was early on in her professional life that she was introduced to the issue of women and subsequently to gender.

> Currently, we are doing something about starting a group on organization of women above 60, or a 60-plus women's group. In *Kwagme* [September] it might be officially launched. 60 plus, some are even 70, I am 69 years old. So the 60 plus includes some of us who have been engaged or some who are actively heading NGOs. What did we get from our engagement, what do we plan to do with what we got? What do we plan to do to fill gaps? What gaps? What lessons could we leave for the next generation? So the 60 plus group, very interesting, even the preparatory work has been influenced by

the restrictions of the agency rules [the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation]. Okay, this would have been really a dynamic NGO, it could still be, although not in the way we know it, but we are thinking and re-strategizing – why not stick to *idir* [traditional social association] kind of things and help ourselves and say let's do something for ourselves who have been caring for others, who have being doing things up to 60. Now what about us, let's stop and think about ourselves. What do we need to do to continue a creative and meaningful life? It may be gymnastics, maybe poetry, and maybe creative skills … what do we do for ourselves and what do we do for others? Because after all, we are in families, so … We even started thinking, oh! the 60 plus should be 20/80, the 80% is for ourselves this time, and 20% is the contribution for the generation to come. First we have to give credit and validate our lives, find out what are the good things, what are the values that we sustained, what are the ones we need to change – change with what? Who guides this change? It could be relationship, it could be skills, it could be attitude, and it could be creativity. Just find yourself!

The 60 plus is about finding ourselves, defending and redefining what it means to be a woman after this age, what is it of value that we could pass on? What are the things that we sustain? What is our role in nation building or reconstruction? Whether we are recognized by the government or not, to make our presence felt and have some input. We still feel that we are strong enough, we have something in us. You don't have to be the head of a big agency but when we get together … Actually, long before that, I had started, with a group of friends, a very informal group. We call it the WHY group. It has not been sustained but we still get together … we call each other … W stands for Women, H, Honour and Y, Yourselves.

Women Honour Yourselves! The idea was sparked when I was working at Oxfam Canada. A very dynamic girl, Mahelet Haile Mariam also, and some other childhood friends, we got together and said when they [women] retire, with no income any longer, no longer in whatever professional life, in that identity, they started to put *netela*[42] [show signs of letting go of the world] and *yeheh church degmo yemetana* [you can add to that churchgoing activity], I am a believer but …

Of course, one of the signs of growth is spirituality, but endorsing this sign of letting go, saying things like "Oh, I am just a retired woman … Oh! I'm just that" … It just means that you have time to reflect, it just means you have time to write, it just means you have time to share what you have, or see what you have to share, knowledge. It just doesn't mean we are dead. Let's just honour each other and validate our lives. That's how it started.

[42] A *netela* is a traditional Ethiopian shawl/wrap that women wear over their dresses. It also allows them to cover their heads when they go to church or other events, such as funerals, etc.

> I joined ECA after the agency I worked for was closed because the German funding was withdrawn. Then I went into ECA as a junior research assistant and later on I grew within ECA and joined the women's centre, which was quite active within ECA at the time. It's an array of dynamic international women, they're from all over the world, Latin America, India, Europe and Africa itself … a couple of them had gone to Syracuse University like me, so the network continued helping me … That was when the women's movement, the African women's movement, was being spearheaded by the African women's training and research centre. Mary Tadesse was there, some others from Nouakchott, Egypt associations.
>
> My experience at ECA was profound. It started from being a mere assistant researcher; I moved to FAO, to work on a project called Freedom from Hunger. There I learned a lot, even to write a small report you read a lot … I went to Kenya to do a study of adult education and learned that women were more into literacy training. For Ethiopia I tried to do the study on my own. Then I went into women and settlement during the Derg's time. It was a difficult time.

The first time I met Yemesserach was when I was working at EWLA. She came to introduce herself to us young women, she said. She spent about half an hour talking to us about different issues including feminism. I remember her as being a very dynamic and attentive person from whom I could learn a lot. However, she was not one of the four interviewees I contacted directly. She was recommended to me by one of the younger activists, who knew her activities and saw her as a role model.

What makes Yemesserach's life story exemplary is that her narrative exposes both the continuities and changes that have occurred in Ethiopian women's lives during the last 60 years. She has grown up looking up to the pioneer women, who were her role models; two of them, whom she even names in her narrative, are W/rite[43] Hirut, her university instructor, and Mary Tadesse, the first director of the African Training and Research Centre (whose article is quoted in chapter five, which focuses on the pioneers). Hence, she represents the modern Ethiopian women who were born after the Second World War, those who were educated and came of age during the imperial period. She is also among those who joined the workforce that their elders opened for them, becoming the young professionals of the late

[43] The short form for *Weyzerit*, a title given to unmarried young women, equivalent to Miss.

1960s and 1970s criticized in the *Ethiopian Herald* newspaper for endorsing the role of the career woman and, by association, that of women's liberation.

Hence, while Yemesserach and her generation seem to represent the first generation of women who benefited from the emancipatory measures of the Haile Selassie regime, they can also be seen as the go-between generation that contributed to the continuity of the emancipatory agenda of the pioneers, just by becoming what they were trained to do – that is, staying in the public sphere, as full participants of the economic and social activity/life of the state while, on the other hand, the younger generation, their successors, were pulled into the revolutionary movement that characterized the period., Yemesserach's subsequent professional growth within ECA is particularly pertinent for this study as she describes an African experience of the African women's movement from within. The atmosphere evoked in her narrative of this period (within ECA) is not only optimistic but is also one of solidarity/sisterhood, enthusiasm and hope for change among the women working in this symbolic institution. She talks about the effects of networking on her career as well as the aspirations and solidarity of women's associations within the continent. The same values, energy and aspiration are evident in her current 60 plus project. This project is not about finding a hobby to fill time; rather, it is the continuation or maturation of the WHY project, the outcome of a reflection on a personal journey.

She and her group could be seen as activists in their own right because they are telling society "we are not dead, we are alive and able to contribute to society but more importantly to live for ourselves, which demands a certain assertiveness to affirm that, yes, it is time to think and just take care of ourselves". It is activism to resist and prove that you are capable of saying no to certain cultural norms that tell you to accept your place in society; these women have never done it, and they don't intend to start doing so today.

Tsereha

Tsereha is a media professional, a journalist with a particular interest in and concern for social justice in general and the equality of women in particular.

She was recommended to me as an influential woman who is a role model and advocate for women's issues. I met Tsereha for the first time during my employment at EWLA as the PR programme coordinator. Hence, we had previously collaborated on advocacy work to promote and inform the general public about the issue of equality of women with men in general and EWLA's actions in particular. Therefore, although the interview process was described and presented the same way as to the other interviewees, the participant, herself a professional interviewer, participated in the process not just as an activist narrating her life story but also as a co-author analysing and decrypting the events or issues raised in the story. In fact, what differentiates this interview from the others is not that she participates in the analysis of the events per se but, rather, that instead of following the chronological order of the interview schedule she reveals who she is and how she thinks and acts thematically. Hence her narrative, which may appear to be disorganized, maintains its coherence through the themes and anecdotes she chooses to tell.

> My first job, I was assigned to the Sports Commission. The person I was going to be working with was a young woman who was my senior at the university. At the time, she was on maternity leave with her second child. When the head of the department heard about my assignment, he just categorically refused my candidacy, saying, if she is a woman I don't want her in my department. So for the following six months, they just sat me in an office without giving me any job, just because he refused. His argument was that the other girl had done nothing more than have kids. Can you imagine, this guy was a member of EPRP, you can understand the implications: he was a revolutionary.
>
> After six months, another department agreed to take me. At first I had nothing important to do, they just gave me a book to translate, and then I started working on radio. Hearing me on the radio, the head of [the first] department asked who I was, that's when he was told that it was "the woman you refused to take because she was a woman". It was only after a year and a half that he accepted me in his department and I got proper work. This is my experience, so it is after facing a lot of challenges that you get somewhere. If you look at the personal experience of each individual woman, you can find some similarities.

One of the themes she raises in her narrative is the issue of inequality of women across different spheres. Here she illustrates her point with her own

professional experience, which occurred during the Derg period and was characterized by the Derg's criticism of the oppressive feudal period in general and the double oppression of women. Moreover, a former member of EPRP, a former "Revo"[44], perpetuated the discrimination she was faced with, showing the discrepancy between revolutionary rhetoric and practice. Although the decision came from an individual, the fact remains that the bureaucratic structure of the office allowed it to continue for six months, which gives an indication of the subordinate place accorded to women, as well as people's tolerance and/or acceptance of such practices. Nonetheless, Tsereha implies that, although there have been some improvements in women's participation in the public domain, the issue still remains. As she testifies,

> I also believe that our mothers protected themselves better than us, or had a system of protection. They had associations like *yetewa maheber*,[45] *ekub yetelalu*,[46] they had more developed sisterhood networks and support systems than we do today. We no longer adhere to such organizations because we are too busy or we look down on them. Meanwhile, we have not created something that replaced those structures. I don't have to go far – look, I am a woman and am head of this organization, but if you ask me how many women have leadership positions, I would tell you just a few. They are just a handful; however, I try to promote women, but somehow, the people surrounding me end up winning. I don't know – it may be due to the screening process, which leaves some of the eligible ones behind. This remains to be examined. I have heard news editors say in front of me that they don't want women because they tend to be more absent than men because of their domestic responsibilities. What they do not see and prefer to ignore is how many times their men colleagues are late to work because they have been drinking on their evenings out and are hungover. On the other hand, the three-month maternity leave that women take is mentioned over and over again …

Here, Tsereha refers back to practices that previous generations of women observed. More specifically, she reflects on their coping mechanisms against patriarchal norms. In so doing, she implicitly recognizes some form of wisdom that modern educated women seem to have discarded, perhaps out of lack or time or a sense of condescension. Hence, she seems to regret

[44] Short for revolutionary – the name given to radical student movement activists.

[45] An informal religious group gathering, honouring a certain saint, etc.

[46] An informal/traditional savings system.

educated women's tendency to let go of some good practices without a proper assessment of their advantages. Moreover, she seems to appreciate the sense of solidarity these structures have provided to women when she links it to her own experience and her apparent difficulty in making her voice heard, despite her leadership position.

Mulatwa

At the time of the interview, Mulatwa was the senior gender expert for an international NGO. I met Mulatwa while working at EWLA. She is one of the youngest interviewees in this study. In fact, as we will observe in her narrative, which is presented in chapter seven, she is close to the new generation of women, the Setaweet group, who proclaim and assume their feminist positioning. She is also the niece of two revolutionary women, one of whom participated in this study.

> When you look at the rural context, infrastructure is very important. When you see the number of schools, you have a pyramid system. I have seen a *wereda (*a district), a *wereda* is huge, and they tell you, for example, that they have 84 schools, but only three are high schools. Can you imagine? How many students of the 81 remaining schools have access to the three high schools? The young girls of the Ziway area I have visited have only three high schools and, most often, they have to walk more than four kilometres to go to high school. You have to add also their home responsibilities in terms of housework. In fact, you can say that they have no opportunity for education, and no opportunity for employment. That's why we have this new phenomenon of emigrating to the Gulf States to provide domestic work, which is another issue.
>
> So I asked the girls if they would get into an early marriage. They said of course. When I asked them why, they responded, what other choices do they have? Getting an education is a challenge, staying with their parents has its own sets of problems, so by getting married at least they can work on their own problems. It's really like a lose–lose situation, and you just have to choose the lesser evil. I was so amazed by what the young girls were telling me, they are so young and yet they are so articulate. When you asked them, what is missing?, they said work opportunities – you know, they are eighth grade students and their concern is already employment opportunities. This is the context in rural Ethiopia.

In this extract, Mulatwa sheds light on the everyday struggles of young female students in rural Ethiopia. She gives an account of what she has observed during one of her fieldwork projects, evaluating programmes

related to gender. Hence, Mulatwa raises one of the major challenges affecting the lives of many Ethiopian women today: education in general and girls' education in particular. Her perspective is pertinent as disturbing facts support it. Mulatwa's narrative exposes how infrastructural problems continue to be an impediment to (in this case) girls' access to education, particularly secondary (or high school) education. In this extract she discloses what some eighth grade female students aged between 14 and 16 from a rural school in the Ziway area have shared with her.

According to the 2013/2014 Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report, Ethiopia has made progress in access to primary education, with a net increase in its primary enrolment rate between 1999 and 2011. Nonetheless, the report also indicates a high dropout rate in the transition to secondary education. Mulatwa's interlocutors' testimony is consistent with the data; however, what the students provide is a human face to the data, by sharing how they live through the situation and how it affects their lives. They provide information on how the problem of infrastructure, or inadequate educational facilities, determines their choices and actions.

The 2005 Revised Penal Code has declared certain cultural practices such as early marriage, abduction and FGM as criminal acts punishable by law. And yet the girls openly admit that they would get married if the opportunity presented itself. The kebele administration is willing to overlook this and even the national census has reported it, conceding to this reality. The problem, according to the young girls, is not lack of awareness about the consequences of early marriage, but rather the absence of future employment opportunities due to the scarcity of educational institutions.

Conclusion

In introducing the interviewees, this chapter not only exposes their perceptions, thoughts and actions but also reveals the themes that emerge from their actions. Hence, while some discussed how the marginalization of gender in different institutions, such as academia, the UN and even the NGO sectors, continues to reinforce prejudices against women, others

emphasized the prevalence of violence committed against women and more particularly the effects of FGM and domestic violence.

Another theme that developed through the narratives is that of the challenges of rural women in Ethiopia. In fact, we can observe the presence of rural women throughout the interviewees' narratives. Rural women's agency, rooted in their wisdom and strength, is referred to both implicitly and explicitly. "I am them," says Dinknesh, and she openly draws on this indigenous knowledge base to co-design with local rural women a progressive programme that aims to eradicate FGM. Others, such as Ababa, Alem and Mulatwa, recognize the contribution of rural women and express profound admiration of them, on which they base their motivation and engagement regarding women's issues.

The third element that comes across in the narratives is that of the dynamics between women's resistance to patriarchy and the resilience of patriarchy. While Ababa speaks of women resisting the norms of society, sometimes by refusing assigned gender roles, Alem refers to women's ability to resist but also to mobilize. For Alem, women like the woman coffee grower in her narrative should be recognized not only as change agents but also as role models.

Finally, the question of feminism is also discussed. The suggestion is that Ethiopian women activists do not reject feminism or feminist values but rather its form, or the way feminism is expressed. They seem more inclined to use the art of negotiation rather than that of confrontation.

CHAPTER FIVE

The legacy of the pioneers

Based on the literature review, this chapter exposes the pioneers' political, social and economic contributions and sets the stage for the revolutionaries' narratives. The chapter is composed of three parts. The first section presents the context of the emperor's era and tries to describe the different characteristics of the pioneers' activism. The second section decrypts the pioneers' activism by referring to what they have written and/or what was recorded about the pioneers and their activism. Particularly, the special issue of the *Ethiopia Observer* on "The Ethiopian woman" provides an indication of their perceptions, thoughts and actions within their specific context. Finally, the pioneers' activism will be analysed from a feminist perspective.

I. The 1955 Revised Constitution: what made Haile Selassie grant women full citizenship?

The political culture of the ruling elite in Ethiopia (mainly from the Christian highland sociopolitical tradition) has been described as having a strictly hierarchical character (Allehone 2002; Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003). Yet, it has recurrently allowed a few women, mainly from the aristocracy and the upper-middle class, privileges accorded to men. Thus, it should be noted that, while ordinary women could own, inherit or sell property and/or land (Marein 1957: 94; Pankhurst, R .K. 1990), noblewomen could exercise power as queens. A few notable women, such as Empress Eleni, Empress Seble Wongel and Empress Mentuab, are among those who have demonstrated women's ability to be leaders (Pankhurst, S. 1957). Others, such as Empress Taytu and W/ro Shoa Regged, have not only fought wars alongside men but have also led wars. In Ethiopia, women have participated in defending the country as active combatants in the resistance and/or as nurses tending the wounded and providing food and shelter (Pankhurst, S. 1957). Hence, they have proved themselves and demonstrated their right to equality.

The issue of women's equality was not included in the 1955 Revised Constitution merely to give women rights that they did not have or fight for. A combination of historical, political and social events led Emperor Haile

Selassie to make the political decision to draft a constitution that satisfied most of his aspirations. Historically, his search for modernity was and remains the goal of many Ethiopian leaders, beginning with the Emperor Theodros II – in the 19th century – and continuing to the present government. However, it should be noted that this has been dramatically accelerated since the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie. The multiple military confrontations with European colonial powers and the imbalance in terms of military weaponry may partly explain the focus of Ethiopian leaders. Thus, getting Ethiopia out of what is perceived as "backwardness" or "underdevelopment" played "a catalytic role in the on-going tradition of reform and tendency to sporadic radical action that marked the history of modern Ethiopia" (Bahru 2001: 104). One factor that has played a major role in the transformation of Ethiopian society is undoubtedly the introduction of western education: new avenues have opened up for young Ethiopians to receive western education within and outside the country. Bahru (2001) writes that "interest in modern education in Ethiopia goes back to the 19th century. The missionaries, who saw education as an effective means of proselytization, were active in establishing a number of schools and sending the more promising students abroad" (p. 103). In 1928, two sisters, Senedu and Yewubdar Gebru, had the opportunity, mainly available to male students, to attend schools in Switzerland (Bahru 2001). One of them, Senedu, became the pioneer of the promotion of women's equality, both in her role as the first woman to be appointed as a school director and later as one of the first two women deputies[47] to be elected in Ethiopia's first parliamentary election in 1957 (Bahru 2001). However, it would be a very narrow interpretation to attribute Senedu's active role in the political and social sphere solely to her acquaintance with western education. Senedu's introduction to public life started when she was quite young. As a child she used to accompany her father *Kentiba* (Mayor) Gebru in some of his official visits to the imperial palace and other public places, and this exposure to Ethiopian public life surely contributed to her knowledge of the running of Ethiopian political life. Moreover, similar to her predecessors, Emperess

[47] The other woman deputy was W/ro Ketsela Belachew.

Taytu and other Ethiopian women who fought in the military against the Italian colonial invasions, she joined at an early age the resistance movement of young Ethiopians known as the Black Lions, led by Ras Imru Haile Selassie,[48] in which she spent three years until her capture as a freedom fighter by the Italians. “I think she sees herself as an anti-fascist resistance [fighter], a person of the anti-fascist resistance, more than anything else, and I think that shaped her identity” her son Samuel Assefa comments in a video (Terusew 2015) commemorating her legacy for Ethiopian society in general and Ethiopian women in particular.

Politically, the emperor’s desire for international recognition also played a role in opening the door to the integration of women’s formal citizenship in the constitution. Emperor Haile Selassie’s regime lasted from 1930 to 1974, during which he introduced two constitutions: the Constitution of 1931, just prior to the invasion, and the Revised Constitution of 1955. The former represented the first constitution to have been written in Ethiopian history. This constitution, promulgated within a year of Emperor Haile Selassie’s coronation in 1931, ensured “*every*” Ethiopian*,* equal rights under the law (my emphasis). Despite this inclusion, the 1931 Constitution had some restrictions inscribed in articles 31 and 32; these stipulate that, while members of the Senate would be appointed by the emperor from “among the dignitaries (*mekuanent*) who have for a long time served his empire as princes or ministers, judges or army leaders”, those sitting in the parliament would be “chosen by the dignitaries and local chiefs … until the people are capable of electing them themselves”. The implication is that the 1931 Constitution was discriminatory to both men and women of certain classes and/or ethnic groups.

The Revised Constitution of 1955 granted all Ethiopians, women and men, full citizenship.[49] That provided women in particular with full entitlement to their civil rights, giving them access to the public sphere and thus opening the door to different levels of education and to employment with equal pay.

[48] Ras Imru Haile Selassie was the Emperor Haile Selassie’s cousin, thus belonging to the royal family, and as such he organized the Ethiopian resistance.

[49] See specifically articles 37, 38, 43 and 47 of the Revised Constitution.

Consequently, the Revised Constitution was designed for a modern state, in which the Emperor Haile Selassie's legitimate position as a modern ruler was recognized locally and internationally. In addition, although Ethiopia's membership of the League of Nations did not prevent Italy from invading this African member state in 1936, and the other members opposing its invasion, the emperor still desired and continued his efforts towards the ability of his country to satisfy UN standards. Hence, these factors consequently helped to prepare the ground for the 1955 Constitution, which legitimized and made accessible privileges previously only enjoyed by men and women from the aristocracy, particularly to women emancipated in the resistance and to urban women. However, the mere existence of such factors shows the negotiated nature of such advances and concessions.

In 1936, Italy's renewed attempt to invade Ethiopia partly succeeded. One major outcome of the occupation of five years, as mentioned in relation to Senedu, was women's participation in the resistance movement. Women did not merely participate passively in the resistance; they were active and they sometimes occupied leadership positions (Pankhurst, S. 1957; Bahru 2001). W/ro Shoa Regged "was quietly active in organizing an Ethiopian intelligence service, and in procuring arms for the patriot-general, Abeba Arragai … [She] led a body of Ethiopian patriots to Addis Alem, where she surprised and defeated an Italian force" and "everywhere in her journey thither, exhorted the people to rise and do as she did in Addis Alem", writes Pankhurst (1957: 84), who recorded the story of this extraordinary woman.

One characteristic of the resistance was that it was not necessarily class biased. Ordinary women took part by providing food and shelter or transmitting information to the resistance patriots. As Zenebework, an Ethiopian woman scholar and activist, recalls in the interview/articles granted to EMWA,

> My mother used to take food and other stuff for W/ro Shoa Regged, disguising herself as her daughter for a long period of time. I was highly fascinated by the story of the patriot: the love she has for her country, how she became a patriot, how she was committed to making all the sacrifices that were needed at that time, how rich the family that she came from was and so on. (Genet, EMWA transcript)

Not only has she served her country in a time of need, but she has also left an imprint of inspiration for future generations of women.

Consequently, if women could participate and hold positions of power during the war, one can assume that they can also do so during peacetime. Moreover, since equality was accessible for privileged women, mainly from the nobility, all that was needed was to extend it to other social groups. That was exactly what Emperor Haile Selassie did with the 1955 Revised Constitution, which granted formal citizenship to Ethiopian women.

II. Emancipation of women: the pioneers' agenda

With the 1955 Revised Constitution, the Ethiopian woman certainly acquired full citizenship, which implied the equality of women with men before the law. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, in practice, Ethiopian women, and particularly women from the nobility and privileged classes, have traditionally enjoyed a certain form of "formal citizenship" or equality with men, which, contrary to western assumptions, emanates from customary rules. In fact, after reviewing the Fetha Negest,[50] the above-mentioned constitutions of 1931 and 1955, which dealt with the status of women in both the public and private spheres, Allehone 2002 observes that in Ethiopia customary law has an important role in regulating family life, more than the official state Civil Code or Islamic Sharia law. He gives different explanations for such legal plurality, one of which is the distance of the states from local communities, which implies that there are different normative rules according to the values of different communities.

Nonetheless, he also asserts that the application of customary rule does not necessarily mean that women have fewer rights. In fact, based on his review of literature from anthropologists and historians specializing in Ethiopian culture and history, such as Levine (1965), Crummey (1980, 1983, 1984)

[50] According to Allehone (2002), the Fetha Negest "is a venerated secular-religious canonical law which was transplanted in the 13th century into Ethiopia from Alexandria where it used to apply among the Coptic Christians" (p.1335; see Peter Sand 1980). In this specific article, he examines the status and role of women in the family and the construction of gender. He then highlights the disengagement of Fetha Negest with regard to women's position in the family by exposing the patriarchal norms and values determining questions relating to the status of women in society in general and the family in particular.

and R. K. Pankhurst (1990), he argues that, despite the indisputable patriarchal order that regulates Ethiopian society in general, the customary laws applied in different communities allow women some rights with regard to their choice and number of marriages and divorces, as well as property and inheritance rights. However, he also nuances this statement by adding that customary rules also represent women as weak, untrustworthy, etc., in their folklores (Allehone 2002: 1342). The implication of such an observation is that the position and status of women in Ethiopia is complex and that any attempt to modify or modernize the legal system needs to take these factors into account.

From the pioneers' point of view, the formalization of women's rights was seen as key for access to the different fields that they perceived were only open to men. Hence, for the pioneers, there was no need for radical change with regard to gender issues. Progressive change was occurring and women's conditions were being improved in the political, social and economic spheres. Thus, while S. Pankhurst (1957: 75) writes "no legal barriers exist to restrict them … progress, after all, is not automatic, even when legal barriers are removed", Senedu (1957: 77) adds, "Ethiopian girls are fortunate in being in a position to realize their aspirations under the patronage and constant encouragement of both sovereigns".

At this moment, Ethiopian women believed that they were entering the world on terms of equality with men. They did not, therefore, push for structural change that took into account the effects that poverty/class, ethnicity and religion have on different groups of women. Neither did they base their action on the theme of solidarity between all women. Instead, they organized "as a non-profit-making charitable corporation" and opted for charity work based on volunteer engagement as a strategy to improve the socio-economic situation of women and help those whom they considered less fortunate.

The best-known association was EWWA, founded in August 1935 by the late Princess Tsahai under the patronage of Her Imperial Majesty the Empress. During the Italian invasion, the association continued to function in England and was re-formed in 1941 after the liberation of Ethiopia. But it was only in

1953 that the emperor granted the organization an imperial charter, under the title of “Ethiopian Women’s Welfare Association” (Makda 2000; Women’s Affairs Office at the Prime Minister’s Office 2007). Another organization, the Ethiopian Women’s Volunteer Service Association (EWVSA), was also founded by middle-class women operating with largely similar objectives. Thus, their mobilization was either based on what they perceived as their duty to help other less fortunate women – as in charity work – or, as was the case with the Ethiopian Patriots Association (EPA), intended as a support system for families who lost their providers in the line of duty (Pankhurst, S.1960).

Although it was slow, change was also occurring in women’s social experience. That is, in spite of some women’s success in achieving higher levels of education, leading to a prestigious professional life with higher responsibilities, the majority of women with high school or college diplomas joined “a new development in Ethiopian social history [which] is to be found in the emergence of Ethiopian women secretaries and typists” (Pankhurst, R. K. 1957: 99). While in western societies, junior clerical, sales and bank teller positions had already been feminized in the 1900s, leaving women to perform these routinized, deskilled tasks for less pay than managers or the men who had previously undertaken this work (Freedman 2003: 157–160), in Ethiopia, Naomi (1957: 102) affirms, “most offices are now run by girl secretaries who have graduated from the commercial school, or who have taken private lessons in business administration and office skills”.

The recent and limited industrialization had had little impact on women’s lives, but education provided an opportunity for women to join the public sphere, gaining economic and social empowerment. There are two reasons for this success. First, secretarial work was still only accessible to educated women, which implied those in or close to the elite group. Second, it did not break or threaten the dominant role of women in society: their reproductive role. As Naomi (1957: 102) suggests, through education and employment “improvement in standard of living will come, for example in childcare and welfare; better standard in the home i.e., cleanness, hygiene, home nursing

and dietetics". The implication is that even Naomi a pioneer, does not question this gender role.

"Now the status of women throughout Asia and Africa is undergoing a drastic transformation, largely as a result of Westernization", writes Mary (1957: 104) in the years immediately following the new constitution, and adds that "social emancipation in many of these countries [Asia and Africa] still has to penetrate the centuries-old customs and traditions". There is no doubt that access to formal and/or higher education and new employment opportunities contributed to the improvement of Ethiopian women's social, political and economic status. But this has all been informed by the western values and thinking embedded in them. In other words, westernization has certainly brought change but it has also come with its own elements of patriarchy. In fact, in this case I argue that western patriarchy was imported in the form of secretarial work and has served to reinforce local patriarchy.

Moreover, the first setbacks in the position of women resulting from the adoption of western practices were reinforced by another regressive law in the form of the 1960 Civil Code. Here is what Fitawri Amede Lema, a fellow imperial parliamentarian, reported with regard to the debate that occurred before the law was passed (an extract from a documentary film; Yemane 2008):

> There were two female parliamentarians at the time: Mrs Senedu Gebru and Mrs Ketsela Belachew. Mrs Senedu Gebru was educated. She was part of the educated group that was sent abroad for their studies in 1927. She was powerful, not only [because] she was Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, but also by the arguments she presented in the Civil Code that was submitted to parliament at that time. It was stated that the husband was the head of the household and that the wife was answerable to him; there were many such articles oppressing women. Mrs Senedu, enlightened ahead of her era, disputed the validity of those articles: once the emperor has declared us all to be equal, the marital relationship should be consensual and no law oppressive to women should be included. When the issue was up for a vote only one other person supported it. She was furious. "You men who have come to this House, both men and women elected you but I have taken note your consideration favours men exclusively. The decision that you have taken today, after a given time, will be revised when a large number of

> women are voted into the House. It will not last long," she declared and stormed out.

This testimony shows that, despite traditional practices, newly imported laws limit women's rights. The result of the debate is an indication of this process – that is, not only do we see the deputies' lack of support on the issue of women's equality but we also see the important role of patriarchal culture and how it can be used to prevent progress, in this case the emancipation of women: it seems that the importation of the western model into the new Ethiopian legal culture had, in this case, the opposite effect. In other words, while one might have expected that westernization would support women's equality, instead it limited the emancipation of women. The local patriarchal order was not ready to let women join the public sphere just yet and found in western patriarchy an ally to affirm its superiority.

Accordingly, in describing the workings of "legal transplant" of the 1960 Civil Code and gender construction, Allehone (2002: 1346) writes that "the 1960 Ethiopian Civil Code ratified a Western-type patriarchy in a number of its provisions". As examples, he cites articles 635, 637, 641(2), 635(b), 64(2), etc., in which the husband and wife's position and relationship are constructed with the husband being the master and responsible for the household, etc. (p. 1347). The implication is that the transplanting of western laws does not necessarily bring progress, or emancipation to women. In fact, in the case of the 1960 Civil Code, the importation of western law was regressive rather than progressive. It strengthened the existing patriarchal order by giving it a legal and modern form.

The idea that women should remain in the private sphere and concentrate on their housekeeping and caregiving role is further illustrated in articles found in the *Ethiopian Herald* in 1960. Here is an example, entitled "A career woman or a housewife?":

> Is it out of genuine desire to prove her education that she is flooding the offices, or just to find out *how many of the opposite sex she could lure* and *outwit by her sexy charms* … this has been the question that many men have been attempting to answer ever since women bid adieu to the home and started careering outside the kitchen … Smart and sophisticated to the fingertips as she is, this *tart-tongued, even*

> *loud-mouthed, young lady of the times hardly knows the answer herself*. … or is she just hell-bent to disavow that *gruesome dictate of nature and irksome fact that she is the weaker sex?* (Getachew 1960) (my emphasis)

Disapproval of the woman who chooses to pursue her career dominates. In this extract, the Ethiopian woman who dares to "make the fullest use of her newly acquired emancipation" is criticized (Getachew1960, 2). It is asserted that she is denying her ascribed role and going against *nature* and this is taken as an affront to the new order under construction. Given this, the author considers he has the right and obligation to set the record straight. His opinion of the role and place of women is crystal clear: they should be at home taking care of the household and minding the needs of their children instead of leaving them to the care of the maid. Although the question of women's place in the public domain and/or whether they could manage to fulfil both domestic and public roles is posed, the fact that a national newspaper could contain articles that are so derogatory to women, and that the staff – all male – of the newspaper feel free to write about them without any constraints, shows the real place that women were expected to have in this society. Interestingly, the men writing these articles were those highly educated men who had attended the newly emerging western schools or, more often, had acquired their education abroad in western universities.

Following some reactions and complaints about his previous article, Getachew (1960) writes "Take a tip from the girls, young men". He does not get into discussion about the issue of whether women could manage the two roles of housewife and career woman; instead, he focuses on the relationship between men and women. Hence, he reduces women's main concern to dating problems. He confirms his assumption that women do not work simply because they have the same rights and potential as men to get any employment they want, and in the process acquire economic freedom; rather, he validates his hypothesis, which is that women work only to lure men who have potential as good husbands and providers.

Although it was not expressed openly, many share the vision of women's main role being that of a housewife. This vision is also illustrated in the Friday 25th November 1960 edition of the *Ethiopian Herald*, which ran on its

front page an article about Princess Tenagne Work's School of Domestic Science for Housewives, whose principal aim was "mass education for women, particularly for housewives" and which "concentrated on teaching women home making, child care, personal hygiene, housework, nursing, nutrition, sewing and craft" (*Ethiopian Herald* 1960: 1). Some of the activities taught in this school, for example sewing, craft, etc., were traditionally men's activities. On the other hand, up to the1960s these occupations were widespread in the French, Swiss or English school systems for young women. Hence, again the new importation of "western modernity" led to change, not only in the legal arena, but also in social practices.

The gender role assigned to women is further reinforced in its Friday 25th November 1960 editorial, entitled "Training better mothers", in which the paper described the home as "the place where family life reaches the highest perfection". Here we can detect how the western ideology of "domesticity" (Williams, 2000) based on the idea of *the home as a safe haven* where women and children are protected from the hardship of the outside world comes into play:

> Society revolves around the home and the home around women … The transition of Ethiopia to modernity has not in any way left women to consolation of dominance in the kitchen, in spite of all the prevalent prejudices. Their Imperial Majesties were sources of great encouragement and inspiration for the intellectual emancipation of women, who now enjoy equality in education. How could the atmosphere of refinement pervade the home if those who presided over it and cared for the future generations were left illiterate and without knowledge of home management? (*Ethiopian Herald* 1960: 2)

The purpose of an editorial is to give readers an idea of the paper's stand on an issue. This extract illustrates the paper's vision of what women's role should be in a modern society. The tone of the editorial is positive and the reader can easily detect the approval of the benefit of women's vocational training. When the author writes of "the intellectual emancipation of women who now enjoy equality in education", he clearly means education related to home management and hygiene, which shows the norm that the society of the time considers appropriate for women. Hence, domesticity, the modern face of patriarchy, again slides in comfortably, not only with the idea of

institutionalizing motherhood but also by describing the separation of the private and the public spheres as a fait accompli.

Meanwhile, the first page of the edition of Thursday December 13 reports on "the participation of women in public life". Women leaders from 25 countries and territories in Africa attended the "all African women's seminar on human rights"**.** The paper also announced the participation of a "five-man delegation" – all of whom were women – led by W/ro Senedu Gebru, who was nominated and elected chairman of the seminar. Referring to women's role in Africa, she said that

> women's role in building our African nations, and our African unity, is a stunning fact … The hindrance of women in public life is mostly in our own mental attitude. Women, *invited or uninvited*, must participate in the very fibre of the architecture of work to be done. *There is no echelon they cannot touch and reach*. (*Ethiopian Herald* 1960: 1) (my emphasis)

This is clearly a feminist stance. Women like W/ro Senedu Gebru existed and were proof of the fact that at least some women in Ethiopia were going forward, showing that they were capable of entering the world on terms of equality with men. Conscious of the resistance they were about to experience or were experiencing, they came to this seminar. The paper's coverage of the event concludes that

> This is a sort of self-help discussion aimed at solving common problems. Neither the participants of the Seminar nor the UN are endowed with executive power with which to enforce laws on matters it considers to be deprivation of fundamental human rights.

Further examination of the content of articles published in this newspaper during the early 1970s illustrates, not how female student activists participated in the student movement, but rather what the social implications were of women's entry in the public sphere. This echoes not only the tension between conservative and liberal forces but also the ambiguity located within the liberal gender discourse. For example, an article entitled "Men urge women to be well informed" sets the context of the time by reminding the reader that, with talks about "women's lib" everywhere, it was time to discuss what women expected of their lives (*Ethiopian Herald* 1971:4). It affirms that they wanted equality in every sphere of their lives: at work, at school and at

home. However, “it seems”, the article continues, “a selfish and essentially trivial desire” (*Ethiopian Herald* 1971: 4). Hence, women are explicitly accused of prioritizing their own needs above those of their partners and children.

Moreover, the article reports, if women really wanted equality, the men of the time thought that in exchange they should read more about world affairs, such as Maxwell’s controversial book *India’s China war*, or they should try to understand why the younger generation seemed “disenchanted with the world as it is today”. Instead, they continued to “be content to occupy their minds with rising prices” and running their household (*Ethiopian Herald* 1971: 9). What is illustrated in this article is the continuity in perception of women’s roles in society from the early 1960s to the early 1970s. The more the idea of the women’s liberation movement spread, the more that arguments against women’s participation in the public sphere were persistently articulated, despite the radical movements that were developing during that period. It seems to me as though the people writing these articles wanted it both ways: they accepted women’s equality as long as it did not interfere with the domestic and caregiving role of women.

III. The emancipation of women and the resilience of patriarchy

The literature shows that during the imperial period the question of equality was not raised by women but rather by the system in power (Pankhurst, S. 1957; Senedu 1957), as evidenced by the imperial support and encouragement for women’s emancipation. Nonetheless, this interest was not merely raised out of concern for women but was, rather, a negotiated effort to accommodate both the emperor’s and elite women’s aspiration to achieve a modern society. As a result, several complex outcomes characterize this effort towards the emancipation of women with men.

First, in relation to the emperor’s full support for women’s emancipation, it should be noted that the 1955 Revised Constitution, which the pioneers praised, also introduced a few regressive articles (articles 5 and 18). While the previous constitution clearly stated in Article 6 that “the throne and Crown of the Empire shall be transmitted to the descendants of the Emperor”,

Article 5 of the 1955 Revised Constitution particularly stipulated that “only male” members of the emperor’s lineage could access the throne. In a country that has historically been led by a number of queens, including the influential Empress Taytu in its recent history, introducing such an article is discriminatory against women and has a powerful meaning, at least symbolically.

Second, despite the emperor’s desire to grant women formal access to the public domain, society and public opinion seemed reluctant to accept the liberation of women from the private domain. The widespread perception of women as caregivers and homemakers remained and was not even questioned, even by the pioneers for that matter. The assertion was that this was their natural role. As a result, questions about the division of labour or gender roles were less likely to be posed or analysed. In such circumstances, it was naïve to expect dramatic change in the conditions of women in society.

Consequently, the “progressive” changes in the public domain, necessary to advance the cause of women, were nonetheless insufficient to guarantee women the full access they promised. That is because the changes did not go deeper and challenge the constraints of the private domain. Instead, these constraints were legalized and presented as modern. In reality, the restraints of the private sphere as a limiting factor were not addressed; rather, it is as though neither the system in power nor the pioneers dared to raise it as an issue. Perhaps this was because it would destabilize the status quo. Or was it because it did not affect the ambition of elite women whose access to the public sphere was not threatened, as they could depend on other, less privileged women to provide care and/or domestic work?

To push the analysis further: the concept of the public and private spheres is itself a result of the modernization process – more accurately, a result of the westernization process – as, “until the 1974 Revolution, the society had the appearance of ‘feudal’ political structure”[51] (Pankhurst, H. 1992: 5), in which

[51] There has been considerable debate as to whether Ethiopia in modern history should be referred to as feudal, semi-feudal, or neither. For instance,

women carried out different duties in and outside the household. Williams (2004: 21) writes about how in the 18th-century United States, a variety of work, including that traditionally associated with men, was accepted as women's work. The point that she wants to make is that women doing men's work was not a problem because "men and women were not defined by their separate spheres". However, "women were, instead, defined by their inferiority" (p. 21).

Similarly, in the 1960s, despite all the measures taken to achieve modernization, Ethiopia was still said to be in a feudal system, in which women's position in general was defined by the patriarchal system in place (Allehone 2002; Eshetu 2005). The majority of the population lived in rural areas and depended mainly on agriculture for their livelihood, based on the household economy, in which women's workload was not defined as being in a separate sphere. Rather, women were defined by their reproductive role (Pankhurst, H. 1992), which was intertwined with their productive roles. Moser (1989) identifies the triple role of low-income women in the Third World, which is their reproductive, productive and community-managing role. Consequently, when newspaper articles described the home as "the place where family life reaches the highest perfection", they were not referring to what had been the case in traditional Ethiopia, but rather to what the modern and urban patriarchal society of the time would rather regard as women's rightful place. The establishment of vocational schools and the inclusion of home economics in the curriculum of girls' schools seem to reinforce this view. Such a view was the outcome of the successful importation of the western ideology of domesticity that identifies the home as the safest place for women and locates women in the private sphere. In Ethiopia, this description of the home was accessible, primarily if not exclusively, to middle-class women who had had access to education. The assumption of

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when discussing the social system attached to Ethiopia in 1974, while H. Pankhurst (1992: 5) writes "until the 1974 Revolution, the society has the appearance of 'feudal' political structure", Teshale (1995:156–157) refutes "Addis Hiwet's 'feudal lord' ruling class, Bahru Zewde's 'advanced feudalism', and Patrick Gilkes's 'mechanized feudalism' … What is explained as feudalism is due rather to peripheral status in the capitalist world economy". On the other hand, Messay (1999) writes about the inappropriateness of the term "feudal" to describe the Ethiopian political system before 1974.

the “home as a safe haven” was therefore class biased and based on a “privilege” that only those close to the ruling class could achieve. Women who had joined the newly developed sectors, such as secretarial work, nursing and teaching in primary schools, were the ones that the newspapers were complaining about. It was they who carried the weight of changing the roles of women that “nature” created.

The pioneers expected equal opportunities and equal access to the public sphere for women who *aspired* to it. Through EWWA, the pioneers raised funds to establish or fund small vocational structures in which underprivileged women could acquire some income and housekeeping skills. Hence, either their discussion of the position of women in society was based on a conception of equality that was simply class biased or they were lucid enough about the context in which they lived and operated accordingly. Either way, they negotiated and manoeuvred progressively, but without pushing for radical change.

Interestingly though, what seems to transpire from the review and analysis of the documents and testimony seen above is that what has occurred in Ethiopia since Emperor Menilek, and more particularly what occurred during Haile Selassie’s imperial era, is indeed a radical form of transformation informed by an intense westernization process. That has certainly brought about progressive changes that have transformed the different spheres of public life, subsequently affecting the way both men and women of the time have acted and interacted both within and outside the home.

Nevertheless, it should again be noted that in relation to women’s place in the country, not everything that was imported from the west was necessarily always progressive for the liberation of women. In the Ethiopian case, paradoxically the importation of western culture also contributed to women losing power, mainly in the private sphere.

The emperor and the system supported women’s liberation only as long as it did not disrupt the patriarchal system in place. This is highlighted by the introduction of the 1961 Civil Code. Allehone (2002) asserts that, according to the drafter of the Civil Code of 1961, Rene David, the new Civil Code was

seen as “juristic revolution … one of the most ambitious attempts ever to modernize a society” (Beckstrom 1974, cited in Allehone 2002: 1344). The emperor’s ambition was to create “a total transformation of society” and “set out new rules appropriate for the society and chose a code system that could modify [Ethiopia’s] structures completely, even the way of life of her people” (p. 1344). Although, as Allehone (2002: 1344) argues, the aim of this codification was motivated “by an agenda of social change, progress, legal modernization and development”, he also highlights a “tradition–change tension” brought about by, some would argue, the pure and simple replacement of traditional law. He continues that, according to Rene David, “in the case of the family law what was attempted is more the systematization and formulation of custom than reform”, which was translated by conceding to customary practice by giving to family arbitrators the first instance jurisdiction to settle family disputes (p. 1346).

The question is, then, how does all this legal transformation or importation affect Ethiopian women’s lives? How did they lose out? And how did they cope? Whether it is due to the abandonment or systematization of traditional laws, women have lost some of their negotiated power, which allowed them certain liberties. For example, S. Pankhurst (1957) writes that, unlike English married women of the 19th century, Ethiopian women of former times, as well as contemporary women, had the right to own property/land, inherit from their parents or dispose of their legacy to their successors regardless of their sex. They had a right to divorce and, as Marein (1957) confirms, they were given custody of their children until the age of four or seven, depending on the judges’ decisions.[52] They also had an equal share of the property acquired during their marriage. Accordingly, from an ideological perspective, the ruling class of the emperor’s period did not seem to have difficulty accepting the concept of equality of women with men, since women from the nobility or the higher classes have historically negotiated and experienced some form of equality with men.

[52] Judge Nathan Marein, Advocate General and Advisor to the Imperial Ethiopian Government.

Allehone (2002) traces gender relations in the different traditional and recent legal systems in Ethiopia. In relation to the Fetha Negest, he writes that, despite the canon law, which clearly stipulates the inferior position of women, in practice the layperson as well as members of the nobility could choose, for example, to observe less restrictive marriage rituals that allowed them easy dissolution of marriage and remarriage according to their wishes. The implication is that divorce was easily accessible to Ethiopian Christians from all class, as well as both sexes. Consequently, both men and women could remarry as many times as they wanted without the fear of excommunication by the Church. What makes this cultural acceptance of divorce and remarriage exceptional, from a feminist perspective, is that, unlike in many other (including some western) countries, women could divorce their spouses and remarry as often as men. As for Muslim law, with regard to the family and marriage the mixing of Islamic law with local rules/customs and indigenous norms has a moderating effect compared with the strict application of Sharia law, asserts Allehone. That consequently affects the position of women by allowing Ethiopian Muslim women more freedom than communities in other Islamic countries that observe Sharia law more closely.

Finally, according to the author, one consequence of the marginal application of the Fetha Negest (limited interference of the Church in matters related to marriage and divorce) and the mixing of Islamic law with local rules is the dominance of customary law, regulating issues related to the family. However, Allehone (2002: 1340) nuances his assertion by stating that “the state of affairs was not dramatically altered by the promulgation of the Civil Code in 1961 and, a decade after the 1970s, a significant population of Addis Ababa performed their marriage in customary way”. The implication is that, whether the legal changes that occurred are the fruit of the transplant of “a Western-type patriarchy” or, as suggested by Rene David, “more a systematization and formulation of custom than reform”, women have lost out in the process. Nevertheless, they have acted as they have in the past by adapting and navigating through the layers of the different systems, as seen in the example above, by choosing the system that serves them best, in this

case opting for customary marriage, or like the pioneers, engaging in a struggle for the social, political and economic empowerment of women.

The suggestion is that the pioneers, and more particularly Senedu Gebru, were not merely social change agents but, rather, feminist pioneers in their endeavour. Hence, women like Senedu did not come to the position they held due only to their social background, imperial support and/or western education but also to the values inherent in the socialization process and their lived experience. When we looked at Senedu's upbringing, for example, we saw that her gender did not prevent her father Kentiba Gebru from taking her with him to all sorts of public events. Hence, it was not exceptional for a father of some nobility to take his daughter to the imperial palace and other places. Moreover, he sent both his daughters, Senedu and Yewubdar, to Switzerland, and not his sons, which gives some indication of the status of elite Ethiopian women but also reflects some form of emancipation by itself. Contrary to popular belief, female students were not sent abroad because there were no schools for women in Ethiopia, but, rather, because at the time there were no schools at all for further education, either for male or female students. Moreover, the fact that, while Senedu chose to become a public figure, her sister chose to go another way – as a religious person living to this day in Israel – shows that they were allowed to be individuals who could take bold decisions on their own. This is also illustrated by Senedu's choice to join the Black Lion resistance movement, when she could have chosen to go abroad and join her husband.

Conclusion

Consequently, based on the literature review and analysis of the pioneers and the period in which they lived, I have developed the following conclusion: "the process of modernization (read: westernization) came with its own structure based on western patriarchy, which reinforced local patriarchy. In this new formalized patriarchy, Ethiopian women's negotiated power was diminished".

However, with the apparent imperial support, elite women organized and decided to work within the system to improve first their own "formal"

positioning and then that of other women within the perceived values of the time. Consequently, taking for granted the issue of equality, they failed to see the full impact of the westernization process in curtailing their power of negotiation gained in earlier times. Hence, many scholars (Almaz 1991; Alem 2008) have noted that the issue of women's rights was officially put on the national agenda, not during the imperial regime, but rather during the Derg regime. I would argue that, despite the above-mentioned assumptions, the pioneers of the time raised the issue of the equality of women with men in the public sphere, and paved the way for the next generation to continue on the feminist agenda.

CHAPTER SIX

Narratives of the revolutionaries

The aim of this chapter is to explore how four of the "revolutionary women activists" introduced in chapter four define, reconstruct and give meaning to their individual or collective experiences of activism. In the process, I hope to explore the particular world views and/or consciousness of issues that emerged from their narratives. For the purpose of illustrating the revolutionary engagement of women's activism, I have chosen to present the narratives of four of them. To limit the arbitrariness of my choice in presenting these four revolutionaries' narratives, criteria such as group membership and area of political engagement have been considered. Three of them have been engaged in activism in Ethiopia, while the fourth started her journey of struggle during her study abroad. It should be noted that each of the four interviewees has belonged to or has been associated with a different organized group. Moreover, the modalities of activism differ. While Tesfa has been engaged in political activities that include the armed struggle in rural Ethiopia, Lemlem's activism has been concentrated on urban clandestine opposition. Rahel has been a sympathizer with an organization that "tactically" associated itself with the government and was at one time an officially recognized political movement before it became a clandestine party of opposition to the military regime. Sehin has been among those revolutionaries who were organized by the military regime. Each of them illustrates a different path of engagement within the range of activism that has existed in the country.

Sehin is an activist who has participated in the student movement and later joined the Derg, ending up among the lead cadres of the party. The chosen extract[53] of her narrative describes the development of her awareness of political issues, the context and the circumstances of her recruitment, and her actions as a Derg cadre. The second revolutionary woman is Lemlem, who tells the story of her own and her comrades' political action and/or

[53] Please refer to the appendix B to find the long extracts of four of the revolutionary women's narratives analyzed in the following section.

participation within EPRP. Throughout her narrative she uses the pronoun "we", representing her comrades in general, both male and female. However, she gives a gendered perspective, as she constantly turns back in her narratives and highlights actions proper to women. The third activist, Tesfa, was a member of the Abiot group (a university-based grouping with a leftist perspective). When the group decided to merge with EPRP, she left, and she later became an important member of TPLF. She shares her journey within the guerrilla struggle of TPLF. The fourth activist whose trajectory I present is Rahel, a sympathizer of Meison who represents the voice of activists from the Ethiopian Student Movement abroad; she tells us about her path towards political activism both abroad and back in Ethiopia.

Sehin

Consciousness raising process: class, gender and ethnicity, toward "intersectionality"?

In the examined extract, Sehin raises the issue of class, gender and, to an extent, ethnicity. She offers the perspective of a young provincial teenager who arrived in the big city and reveals what she saw and how she felt at the time and the context in which she lived. Hence, the extract paints a picture of a young provincial girl from a modest background, who observes, reflects and acts in accordance with her specific gender, class and ethnicity.

Sehin was born in the Welega region, in the city of Nekemt, where she spent most of her childhood and teenage years. "I did not grow up in a normal family with a father and mother. I grew up in household led by two strong women," says Sehin when talking about her family life. Sehin's biological mother and the woman she called her mother's adoptive mother (whom Sehin described as her own adoptive mother as well) left Godjam for Sudan during the Italian invasion, to escape from the war. After the Italian occupation, they returned to Ethiopia and settled in what was then called Dar Ager[54] by settlers coming from the highlands.

[54] The literal translation is "the town from the peripheries", or it could be referred to as a provincial town.

Hence, Sehin was raised by two strong and independent women who lived on their own playing the role of a father and mother respectively. As Sehin explains "while Shashitu [her adoptive mother] was the assertive outgoing public woman (*yeadababy set*), my mother was taking care of what was going on in the household". Sehin was even registered as Sehin Shashitu[55] in her first school in Welega. What does this tell us about the society in which Sehin was raised? This example is an illustration of how even in the rural Ethiopia of the post-war years that women could negotiate with society on the way they choose to live. As the owners of small farmland, the two women were able to meet their needs and raise their child without conforming to the society's requirement of a heterosexual marriage. Moreover, Sehin also follows in their footsteps when still as a high school student, she decided to go through with an unexpected pregnancy and raise her daughter with the help of a female friend during the early years of her child[56]. Hence, unlike traditional beliefs that describe Ethiopian women as passive victims of patriarchy, the life journey of these three-generation of women is a testimony of Ethiopian women's ability to resist and act according to their own principles and choices. The suggestion is this disposition to resist patriarchal norms or act is transmitted from one generation to another and is rooted in habitus.

Although Sehin was born and raised in Welega and grew up there, in the Oromo culture and speaking the Oromo language, she was also fluent in Amharic. As she puts it, subtly, "my appearance and the way I spoke couldn't be a problem". In this way, she introduces the issue of ethnicity and the potential for a language barrier, which could sometimes be an impediment to the integration process. The second time ethnicity is raised is when she mentions being put in prison based on the assumption that she belonged to the Oromo ethnic group. Later, she explains why she was identified as Oromo and her attachment to the land where she grew up; she comments on

[55] Traditionally children take on their father's surname as their forename. See note 1,

[56] She would get back with the father of her child only once the hectic/terror days of the revolutionary period was over. But the support of this specific woman during Sehin's revolutionary activism is highlighted in her narrative. The suggestion is Sehin herself conscious of her personal history wanted to show the sense of solidarity shared between women.

the association of being an Oromo and belonging to Meison, revealing in this way the arbitrary nature of the Derg's actions.

Concerning the issue of class, her modest social background is revealed as she describes the way she dressed and the fact that she had to go to school barefoot for six months. Her concern for class issues is also explored when she talks about her grand-uncle's occupation, which she judged that he did not deserve to have while more qualified young people remained unemployed. (*Ababa* is her absent father's uncle; throughout the narrative the absent father becomes very present by his absence). Despite the fact that she later realised she had based this view on unsubstantiated beliefs and superficial analysis of his situation, the lack of employment for the educated young was one of the issues raised by the student movement activists and shared by many young people of the time (Bahru 2001). Sehin later refers again to life at her grand-uncle's house to illustrate how her class consciousness was partly based on her personal experience in that house when she states that

> I think the appeal of socialism started with my experience in this specific household. For example, you can observe the different statuses of the people in that household by simply observing where they sit while watching the television. There were several statuses, it started from those who couldn't watch at all, to those who could watch from the hallways, in the living room, while sitting on the floor, on the carpet, on the pouffes or those on the couch, etc.

Moreover, her narrative reveals how the student movement years also contributed to the continuation of the awareness-raising process at schools but also during walks with friends or neighbours, with whom she had discussion on issues such as "*sebeawinet* and *Ethiopiawinet*" (humanism and Ethiopian patriotism).

Nevertheless, Sehin makes a parallel between her own experiences and those of the revolutionary movements as a whole when re-evaluating the basis of her own judgement about her grand-uncle's merit and educational background and that of the revolutionaries of the time. She opens the door for further questioning and reflection about the time as she argues that

> at that time only a few understood what was happening, most of us didn't have a grasp of what was happening. I think that is why the movement was not successful in the end. Because, we had neither the experience, the knowledge nor the practice, I can say that we were fuelled by passion.

With regard to gender, she tells us about her essay "*Lemin yihone*", where she basically walks us through the process of the awakening of her consciousness with regard to a specific issue that she observed and was experiencing and that she now recognizes and could name as "street harassment". Nevertheless, at the time she was more puzzled than upset; she even questioned whether or not it was an "Addis Ababian" thing that she was not aware of. But the issue of gender reappears, as she unconsciously puts herself on stage representing women and recognizes her inspirations through her role models. Not only does her narrative paint a picture of the general context of the time, it also refers to specific incidents that had an impact on the course of her life, such as the time she found herself in prison and got the opportunity not only to meet an inspirational revolutionary woman but also encounter the cause that speaks to her heart. Conversely, Sehin names two women, Yeshewalem Mengistu and Tiruwork Wakeyo, who seem to have played a role in her politicization process. While her relationship with the former revealed with which party or movement her sympathy lies, her relationship with the latter reinforced her beliefs and allowed her to act and become who she is.

Sehin's narrative unravels how her worldview and actions were shaped both by her social background and experience and by the political context of the moment. Her story reveals two factors that facilitated her politicization process. It seems that, on the one hand, her personal character and most importantly her personal life history made her susceptible to the social injustices she observed and experienced, consequently creating the appeal of socialism and its promise of equality for all, and creating a "push" factor towards participation. On the other hand, the existence of an organized structure, in which recruitment processes and networking possibilities were available, as well as the existence of two influential revolutionary women she

could look up to and to whom she could relate, “pulled” her into active participation.

Finally, Sehin’s self-analysis on the consciousness raising process highlights the effects of class, gender and ethnicity in her everyday life, as well as how it shaped her activist experience. Although a Marxist analysis was valuable in her understanding of class, women’s oppression and ethnicity, today, Sehin seems to use intersectionality in the construction of her story.

Lemlem

The process of coming to awareness

Lemlem’s narrative walks us through the process of coming to awareness, followed by her participation in and journey into the bloodiest revolutionary moments in recent Ethiopian history.

> “I don’t believe that people become consciously activist spontaneously. One becomes an activist over time or can be led to become one when triggered or incited by a specific incident. In my case, I believe that the way our parents brought us up contributed to who I am today”

Lemlem starts her narrative by describing her childhood days. She tells us how early on in life she realized she did not like seeing injustice. She explains that she either denounced it or acted on her own to help the victims. In addition to this personal characteristic, she also connects her concern for social justice to the Christian values she acquired while she accompanied her parents to church. Moreover, her father was a civil servant, occupying the position of a judge. Hence, she grew up in a family where the concept of justice was present due to her father’s occupation, an occupation that also allowed them to move around the different regions of Ethiopia following his appointments. That in turn allowed her to get to know not only the different parts of Ethiopia but also its cultures.

Lemlem informs us that she comes from a middle-class family. In fact, despite the class issue that she mentions, which might have kept her apart from community interactions, she highlights her attachment and connection with her “*seffer*” (neighbourhood) community life. The importance of her link

to her *seffer* community is revealed as she comes back to this concept later on in her narrative, advising the young generation to notice first what is around them and to be aware of what is going on in their neighbourhood. This for her was the first step in the awareness-raising process.

Then her narrative skips forward to several years later, to her high school and university years. She exposes events occurring in her high school and then later at the university that led her to participate in the student movement that was occurring during the Haile Selassie regime. Hence, she seems to assert that both family guidance, influenced by Christian values, and her active formative years during high school and university pulled her into the collective action that was arising, first to overthrow the oppressive imperial regime and later to fight the dictatorial military regime that took power after the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution.

The third issue that emerged from the first part of this extract is the politicization process itself. On the one hand, Lemlem underlines the importance of context, including the structural availability to organize and conduct a fully fledged political movement. On the other hand, she emphasizes the power of the cause they were defending with the ideological argument justifying their action. She tells us about the indoctrination process through their readings, which was not limited to the different publications of the movements such as *Challenge*, *Struggle or Democracia*, and she illustrates her point with the example of Greenfield's writing on the aborted coup of the Neway brothers in 1960. What Lemlem is referring to in this specific reading is its account of what occurred during this period. In fact, the period from 1960 to 1974 was characterized by several separate and yet linked events that led to the demise of the monarchy: the attempted coup d'état of 1960, the politicization of the peasant protests galvanized by the Wollo famine of 1973, and the student movement.

Scholars seem to agree that 1960 represented the year that the emperor suffered his first serious opposition, in the form of an attempted coup d'état planned by two brothers, Mengistu and Garmame Neway, who, according to Bahru (2001: 211), "epitomized the military and intellectual components of

that opposition before as well as after 1960". The author observed in his analysis of the coup observers that, despite the fact that the "coup-makers" had good intentions and conducted the coup out of concern for the underprivileged, they were doomed to fail because of their disorganization and "their neglect of the other units of the armed forces and particularly the army and the air force" (p. 213). Gebru (2009) echoes Bahru's (2001) observation that this constituted the most serious challenge that the monarchy had encountered since the liberation in 1941, and argues that, although unsuccessful, this aborted coup had the effect of breaking the mysticism that surrounded the absolutist order on which the monarch had carefully established his legitimacy. Moreover, while it has contributed to the cohesiveness of the fragmented opposition to his rule, it served as an inspiration to students, who "became the true heirs of the rebels" and showed their support by organizing a walk on the streets of Addis Ababa (Bahru 2001: 214).

This account was confirmed by W/ro Hirut Befekadu, a female former student at Haile Selassie I University, now known as Addis Ababa University, during a seminar that commemorated the 50th year of the attempted coup, organized by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. W/ro Hirut, who was one of the guest speakers of the seminar, confirmed that female students did not hesitate to participate in the spontaneous protest march organized in support of the coup-makers and against the violent response of the monarchy. She described how they spent the night preparing their placards and posters for one of the first student protests of the 1960s (personal note from the seminar, 2010). Although W/ro Hirut belongs to the older generation of students who participated in the first protest and had finished school before the radicalization process, her testimony confirms the participation of female students from the beginning of the student movement.

Clearly, the momentum was for the struggle to end the oppression that occurred in a "feudal" regime, which was connected in general to land issues. In other words, the majority were oppressed by the few who had access to land. Nevertheless, as Lemlem describes, despite their collective action having the primary goal of countering class oppression, she could not

help but observe and become aware of another kind of oppression that was perpetuated both at the university and in society at large: the oppression of women.

What emerges from the extract when she discusses gender issues is, first, her surprise. Lemlem seems to have been oblivious to injustices or discriminatory practices suffered by women until her university years. Could it be that because of her middle-class status or/and ethnic background she was unaware of the conditions of women before her university years? Nevertheless, she enables us to see through “the female gaze” of their university life. She tells us how the comments and critics female students were confronted with in their everyday life made them feel. She speculates that the harassment made some of them uncomfortable or powerless to the point that they felt obliged to abandon their studies. One thing that Lemlem and the other interviewees who went to university during this period seem to have overlooked in their analysis is that the treatment that women students were subjected to may be related to the new culture that both male students and society at large were attempting to adopt. Although it is impossible to establish how men in traditional Ethiopia would comment on the way that women were dressed, walked and ate at different times in history, we should bear in mind that in different parts of Ethiopia women have dressed in different ways according to their cultural norms, including being half naked, as is the case in the Gambella culture, for example. The point is that the new enlightenment brought with it not only new dress codes but also new norms such as not showing your legs, no miniskirts – norms that did not apply in traditional Ethiopia.

However, Lemlem’s surprise seemed accentuated by the fact that the time was intended for revolution, and hence justice for all. She could not understand how people who proposed equality for all and struggled against oppression or the oppressive system could possibly think and act the way they did. Hence, she denounces and condemns the sexist attitude and actions of some of the male students of the university in general but those of active members of the student movement in particular. However, her narrative shows that these incidents did at least plant the seed of awareness

in her mind and allowed her to question and develop her consciousness about the issue of women's oppression in Ethiopian society, which was done through a Marxist lens. In other words, Lemlem's consciousness-raising process regarding sexism and discriminatory practices suffered by women was enhanced as she found supporting materials in the theoretical explanation found in Marxist–Leninist writings of the double oppression of women, which she and her comrades were encouraged to read and discuss in their cells.

Hence, it was the reading of Marxism and Leninism that offered the explanation of women's oppression. The question of how this view was relevant to Ethiopian women's conditions and the complexity of power and gender relations in Ethiopia was never addressed. However, this perspective allowed Ethiopian women, and particularly those educated at university level, to become conscious of the oppression according to their reading and experiences. The question is to what extent their investigation and understanding of Ethiopian women's oppression was based on the reality of the context, the level of oppression and, particularly, how women would accommodate or resist this oppression.

She underlines two struggles that seem to emanate from the private and public spheres. She tries to illustrate her point with two different examples, which are at first glance shallow. The first, which could be categorized as being in the private sphere, is about what would happen when a female student refused to go out with a man who asked her out: she would be accused of having a bourgeois attitude, even if she came from a peasant background. Thus, a superficial knowledge of Marxism rather than the reality of class behaviour is used to guilt-trip her into agreeing to date someone she does not like. In fact, in this case it appears to be more a gender issue, in terms of power relations, than a class issue. Beneath it all lies the anchored patriarchal belief in the inferior status of women, which in return relies on "their submissive nature". The second example expresses and reinforces the same idea but within the public domain. Lemlem exposes the difficulty that some male students (if not the majority) had in accepting female students in

leadership positions, even in a student movement in which both male and female students participated equally.

Lemlem's narrative is not linear. She does not follow any kind of chronological order; instead, she lets her story develop as she recalls some painful, nostalgic and rather funny moments of those revolutionary years. Hence, she recounts what it entails to be a political activist, the risks with which they were confronted and the consequences of their efforts. Consequently, she explores how various factors such as context, ideological conviction for a cause, available structures and social ties contributed to the collective action that engaged the youth of her generation.

Lemlem goes forward into her narrative of her revolutionary days by reminding us this was not a forgotten experience that could be revived easily by some incident or event.

> Because it is below the surface, you might forget some of the detail, or might not remember all the songs you learned during that time, but you cannot forget some of the incidents. That experience either makes you stronger or kills you. And in such a short period we saw and learned a lot.

Moreover, she talks about the significance of the relationships that were created at that time. She tells us that their connections were so strong that they could "even hear their silence". In fact, throughout the narrative Lemlem further develops the theme of solidarity and bonding that she experienced during this period, especially in prisons where she and her comrades had to nurse each other after the torture sessions they were exposed to. Moreover, she also talks about how they supported each other by just talking, sharing their stories, and joking about or making fun of each other's actions and reactions in prison. Hence, she reveals that the bonding this created also served as their coping mechanism for the traumas they endured in prison: "I even used to joke that that Ethiopians did not get traumatized". Consequently, the importance of this period in general and the solidarity and bonding she experienced in prison informs her current life.

With regard to their activism, Lemlem compares the activism of the heyday of the revolutionary time with that of EWLA. It seems that she was involved

in what McAdam (1986) calls high-risk/cost as opposed to low-risk/cost activism.

> During the night, we used to write revolutionary slogans in red on walls. Sometimes you had red marks on your face. Or you have to put banners on light poles across the streets where revolutionary guards could catch you, put you in prison or worse shoot you right there.

Her description of her political action within EPRP fits into what McAdam identifies as micro-structural and attitudinal accounts of political participation. Accordingly, as can be seen in Lemlem's narrative, a strong ideological identification with the values of her organization is evident. She repeatedly observes the attachment of its members to their cause. Throughout her story, she underlines the role of ideology, first in the politicization process, then during recruitment and, most importantly, in their high-risk activism, because they were ready to die for the cause they were defending. They were encouraged to raise their awareness, both individually and collectively, by debating and discussing their readings with their cell members. Hence, this structural availability allowed them to organize and facilitate "their integration into the activist networks".

When she talks about how she became a member of EPRP, Lemlem's narrative seems to indicate that her decision to join was not well thought out, that it was somehow the result of circumstances. In her narrative she repeats several times the effect of the context on their decision to join. She emphasizes the sense of inevitability that she and a lot of the youth felt when she responds to those who criticize their action today: "criticizing what had gone wrong – I could do that as well, but not participating then was like swimming against the tide".

Her conversation with her son is also revealing as it sheds light on the collectivist versus individualistic perspective that mother and son held and defend respectively.

With regard to the actual revolutionary activities, Lemlem does not make distinctions. She uses the pronoun "we", which includes both the female and male members of their organization. It is clear that the struggle was primarily

about social justice. “Overall, the struggle was to bring about social justice. It was much later that the issue of women was raised … Whatever the outcome, it was a struggle that touched and affected all the strata of the social world”. The implication is that female members of her party did most of the political activities that the male activists did, such as preparation and dissemination of tracts or leaflets and the writing of slogans on walls, all of which could lead to prison or even death. In fact, what is well described in her narrative but was not named in this extract is the period of the Red Terror. At one point in her narrative, she does say that “the Red Terror did not make any distinction between the two sexes, we were treated equally as we were tortured and killed like men”. The assertion is that female activists did participate in the revolutionary activism; they had similar experiences to those of their male comrades, and they were even tortured and/or killed for their participation. However, they had additional experiences that are part of and could enrich the revolutionary narrative of that period.

For example, Lemlem shares how female activists used gender and class to get out of some dangerous situations, such as when they disguised themselves as mothers or as maids to avoid being arrested and imprisoned; also, changing the way they dressed in prison sometimes provided a little relief. When Lemlem advised Wubit to change and put on the *bitles* (turtleneck) sweater with long sleeves, she discloses how they had to adapt to their situation. They wanted to cover up much of their body, and more specifically their breasts, to protect themselves from torture.

Throughout the whole narrative, Lemlem never limits herself to telling her story. She acts as a co-author; she is not just the object of the study but, rather, a subject who thinks, analyses and comments on the object of the study. Moreover, she assumes a feminist positioning as she recurrently tries to emphasize the contribution of women to the different revolutionary movements. Accordingly, she exposes how the different organizations, including the Derg and EPRP (for the TPLF, see Tesfa’s narrative), strategized and arranged to organize and exploit women’s networks to support their cause. She reinforces her argument by giving the example of women’s contribution in church. She highlights how the Church has

historically used women's organizing skills, available to support any of the revolutionary movements. Nevertheless, as would be seen in Tesfa's narrative, and as Lemlem underlines, EPRP was characterized by chauvinism: despite all their contributions, women were given and occupied supporting rather than prominent roles.

After affirming her role in the women's wing of EPRP, similar to the bigger organization EPRP, Lemlem walks us through the process of women activists' recruitment, indoctrination and participation. In the process, she reveals how she and her female comrades were able to use the Derg's own structures of women's committees to develop new social ties and proceed with the recruitment process. Nonetheless, Lemlem admits, it was difficult to compete with the Derg, as it controlled the kebele structures and specifically the rationing of the food distributed through those structures. Again, the assertion is that women/mothers, as the caregivers of Ethiopian society, were required to sympathize with the Derg or at least play an obedient role if they wanted to feed their children, or even stay out of prison for that matter. The story of her mother asking Lemlem to leave her house so that she could take care of Lemlem's younger siblings is a typical example of that threat.

Tesfa

The making of an activist

In the first part of the narrative, before she raises the role of women in the armed forces, Tesfa discusses how both context and personal background played a role in her becoming an activist.

> The youth, galvanized by socialist ideology, expected and wanted to bring about social change, where people would be more equal and free to choose their government. A number of books related to radical movements circulated at that time. We read a lot on issues like dialectical materialism, historical materialism

She describes both the national and international context and its consequences in the university she was attending in general, and the students' lives in particular. Right from the start, she highlights how the spirit of resistance and the struggle for structural change was spreading and affected the way the students think and act. "It was in that school [the university] that the spirit of struggle was inculcated in me". It is interesting to

note that never at any moment during the interviews did Tesfa, Sehin or the other interviewees question the possibility of their becoming activists at a very early stage of the Ethiopian Revolution in the movements. It is as if it was not taboo for women to take the stage in the public sphere or in public affairs in this particular society. It is as if the possibility of Ethiopian women's participation in resistance movements is inscribed in them or their heritage. Could it be that the collective consciousness allows or has retained the past tradition in society that women can lead internal or external struggles in various periods of resistance?

Moreover, Tesfa does not limit the narrative about her politicization to context and time; she links her receptiveness to her personal history and early socialization. She does that when she brings us back to her formative years and recalls observing the level of poverty in which her community lived and the injustices and hardship that her people, and more specifically the women in her community, were confronted with in their everyday lives, including domestic violence.

> I grew up learning values like helping your neighbour or the poor. I also observed the hardship of women's life, battered women; I grew up seeing all this injustice. All this was embedded in me and used to fill me with sadness.

Hence, the suggestion is that the fact that Tesfa could perceive the injustice faced by women is an indication that women's position of subjugation in Ethiopia, in this case in northern Ethiopia, is not a given or an accepted one. In some societies, women do not perceive that they are dominated and may accept their position as normal. Tesfa seems to see the situation differently. What could have prepared her to hold this kind of critical view so young? Could it be that the fabric of Ethiopian society was fairly tolerant of women occupying leadership positions in society since historically influent women from various times have held significant roles in the running of public life (Pankhurst, S. 1957; Prouty 1979 [57]; Pankhurst, R. 199)? In this case, could

[57]Prouty (1979: 63) in "Eight Ethiopian women of the *zemene mesafint*" [the middle age period in Ethiopia] gives at least some indication on the position of power that some women could hold, or what they could achieve. The eight women were selected out a list of 60 influential women, "because they were either influential in their own right (Mintiwab and Menen), or they were notable for their relationship to an important man (Mintiwab Hizchias,

Tesfa's ability to think and act be informed by centuries of hidden history of Ethiopian women's resistance of patriarchy?

She also underlines the positive and negative effects of her Christian upbringing, with the values it entails. While she seemed to embrace the value of sharing instilled in her early on, she learned to reject the fatalist beliefs that attributed poverty and/or natural disaster to God's will, as something that everyone should accept. Thus, she acknowledges the value of modern education, as it had opened up her horizons by making her question and reject some of the determinist beliefs that were inherent in the Christian faith in which she was brought up. Certainly, her personal background and history was as significant as the broader context in her path to activism: an activism motivated by social injustice in general, analysed and critiqued from the Marxist perspective. Hence, Marxist analysis informed her perceptions of both the Ethiopian people and women's oppression**.** In other words, the revolutionaries in general were not looking at the lived experience of oppression of the Ethiopian people, but rather looking at the idea of oppression as analysed by Marx.

In relation to women, while Tesfa seems aware of the subjugation of women imposed by patriarchy, she seems oblivious to her heritage of women's resistance and attributes her enlightenment and activism to modern education. At least two questions can be raised. First, how is it possible that parents belonging to a society with such determinist attitudes could send their daughter to school and then away to university for higher education? Second, given the apparent backwardness of the society from which she comes, and if her upbringing was so deterministic, how did she dare or manage to become an activist and join a radical political movement and its armed struggle to become one of the main leaders of that movement? The suggestion, again, is that maybe she was raised in society that can accept

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Sahalu, Weleta Rafael, Weleta Tekle, Tabetu Woldu, Sehin)". He argues that " by a process akin to the "blow-up" in photography, when a shadowy figure in the background takes on form and identity, some may even be given recognition for their influence on Ethiopian history".

women participating in such kinds of actions in accordance with previous experiences, particularly during the Italian invasions (Minale 2001). Northern Ethiopia was the main site of resistance to Italian colonialism and most probably the place where women participated largely in the resistance movement.

Nevertheless, Tesfa explains that her motivation was rooted in her search for social justice, and she recognizes the role of her university education and student life in raising her awareness on critical issues close to her sensibilities. She then clarifies how the Ethiopian Student Movement was detrimental in her path to politicization as she walks us through the process of its radicalization, endorsing Bahru's (2001: 222) description of the movement, which states that "the Ethiopian Student Movement which went through various phases of evolution starting as a cultural and intellectual form of an elite saw steady radicalization throughout the 1960s and early 1970s". Consequently, it can be assumed that the Ethiopian Student Movement, which started in the early 1960s and culminated in 1965, offered the structural disposition that the movement needed to organize and to exchange ideas and conduct debates as necessary to articulate its grievances. Gebru (2009: 27) later described this as a generation of young activists "united by a vision of just society, a total rejection of the existing order … they [radical students] shaped political thought and action, ultimately giving birth to the Ethiopian political left".

As with Lemlem, Tesfa's decision to participate, first in a social movement and then in an armed struggle, is based on a collective rather than an individual action.

> Everything was due to the unfair system that was in place. If the system was fair, those without land would have land; those who were unemployed would be employed. Once I went through this process of thought, the solution became crystal clear. Consequently, you come to the logical conclusion that if the problem is the system, then change it.

Furthermore, the critical incident that provoked this activism, despite the fact that drought and famine were mentioned, is derived from a concern of the oppressed and is related to land ownership. "Land to the tiller" was the motto

of the movement, which referred to the responsibilities of political authorities. In fact, except for TPLF's recognition of and reference to what is known as the first Weyane[58] revolts, none of the movements referred to past history of revolts or resistance based on issues of injustice particularly related to centralization. Thus, the practice of contesting the political authorities in Ethiopia was a basic recourse that has existed and been used in the past, which implies a certain continuity in the habit of using collective protest to express grievance. The appeal to collective action that the interviewees described was not simply the fruit of a modern form of organizing based solely on modern education but was also informed by a past history of resistance. Given this, a concerted effort, an organized movement of people sharing a common goal founded on a similar ideology, was necessary to bring about social change by peaceful means if possible and by armed struggle if necessary, Tesfa's story reveals. Growing up in a society where resistance to different forms of domination is celebrated, it did not seem very difficult for Tesfa to become radicalized when she found herself at Addis Ababa University, a place of action for her generation where ideas were exchanged, creating a space where one had access to consciousness-raising sessions in the "student study groups".

Once the imperial regime was overthrown, it did not take long for Tesfa and her comrades to realize that their movement had been appropriated, or, as some would later say, their revolution had been aborted or hijacked by the military.

> I too was among those who believed that this would not be solved democratically. The cause we were defending was worth dying for; therefore, if we had to we would go to armed struggle to bring about the necessary changes.

Bahru (2001) writes that opposition came from a group known as the Forum, which was composed of students and university teachers. Opposed to the establishment of the PMAC, they proposed instead that a "Provisional People's Government" (PPG) be put in place and lead the country. However,

[58] Although Tesfa did not refer to the history of the first Weyane in her narrative, the other two interviewees did mention the first Weyane in the construction of their activist narratives. The first Wayane was a rebel movement against the Haile Selassie government centralization policy in 1942/43.

disagreement on both the composition and the programme of the PPG consequently led the different currents of the student movement or the Forum to become crystallized into parties such as EPRP, the Meison, etc. Moreover, in addition to strategic divergence and rivalry among the leftist groups of the Forum, the Derg's strategy of making provisional alliances also contributed to the failure to establish the PPG. In fact, as Bahru argues, "the PPG became one of the fundamental differences between EPRP and the AESM or Ma'eison" (p. 236). It is in this context that, as mentioned earlier, Tesfa continued her action by joining the Abiot group, one of the opposition parties that later allied with EPRP. Tesfa's firm commitment to the causes she defends was tasted by this alliance. However, as expressed in her narrative, she managed to find a way to support and later join TPLF, the armed group, which was more in tune with her convictions and goals.

The issue that emerges from the second half of her narrative is the experience of women in the revolutionary struggle in general and hers in particular. She shares with us both her actions and reflections on the way things were and how they occurred. We can easily distinguish two periods in her narrative about her experience as a woman in a leadership position of a revolutionary liberation group. In the first part of her story we observe a period in which her focus is on combatant women and their role within the community in general and in relation to women in particular. She walks us through the physical and mental preparation required to become one. She tells us how, although gender-specific natural phenomena such as menstruation could sometimes become a handicap, such challenges were surmountable and did not keep women from the battlefield.

Once she finished her military training, which she admits was strenuous, she was appointed to do political work, which entailed educating the community on what TPLF was about and its political mission and goals. As one of the few TPLF members who actually had a university degree, Tesfa was more than qualified to design and implement TPLF's public education strategies. Through her eyes, we see the patriarchal order that was in place and the level of cultural barriers that the women of the communities she visited were facing. The story about how they had to show their breasts to prove that they

were women illustrates the role of women in those societies. And yet she, and later the 30% of her comrades who were women combatants, came out of the same society. Certainly, this is TPLF's success, and it illustrates its contribution to the empowerment of women. However, this could also show to a certain extent the predisposition of Ethiopian women, in this case Tigrayan women, to get involved in resistance movements.

The road has not been easy. There have been up and downs, which is by itself an indication of the complexities of Ethiopian women's position in society. First, the challenges came from the women themselves, as they had a restricted vision of what women could do. Tesfa enumerates different arguments to convince women to adhere to TPLF's agenda, an agenda that clearly introduced ideas of equality and which placed women as the equals of men. Hence, she and her comrades talked to them about issues such as women's right to land and property, equality between men and women both at home and in public, the effects of early marriage on girls and the participation of women in politics and health. For them, convincing women to eradicate their deeply anchored beliefs was not simple. At a practical level, Tesfa and her friends had to live like their compatriots, following them around, doing what they did and accompanying them in their daily lives and activities to gain their trust. This illustrates the power of the everyday. In other words, this shows how the lives of women in these regions (as well as the rest of Ethiopia, for that matter) were and continue to be anchored with their everyday activities.

Nevertheless, when one looks at how they managed to recruit and mobilize women representing over 30% of the entire TPLF army over the 17 years of struggle, one cannot help but wonder how they achieved this goal, particularly if we take into account how difficult and time-consuming it is to change people's attitudes and mentalities. That could suggest that there was already something in society that predisposed women "so easily" to transgress "societal taboos" and join the struggle in large numbers. It seems most likely that Tesfa, her comrades or the women themselves were not aware of their heritage. The complex position of women in traditional Ethiopia seems in some way to have been reinitiated by the debates and

deliberations conducted by the Tesfa group to mobilize women and men to accept the participation of women in the armed struggle with all that it implied in terms of changes in gender relations. The backlash within TPLF at the second conference could be read as a moment for men to resist. TPLF's strategy to include women in the struggle and in public life worked so well that, as suggested by Tesfa, the men within the leadership could see how profound and deep the change was, even more than they had predicted. On the other hand, even if some of the women in the leadership of TPLF's women's organization lost their position at that moment, they did not lose out entirely because they continued in their own ways as the seed was already sown. Tesfa and her friends lived like their male comrades, doing what they did and acting in all spheres of armed struggle.

But most importantly, what emerges from this extract is not just a TPLF's women's issues/rights programme but rather its clearly feminist agenda. Tesfa's narrative clearly articulates "western" feminist ideals, as it defends the idea of women's equality with men in all sectors of life, recognizing their oppressed position and advocating action empower women. However, it seems that no specific feminist agenda acknowledging the complex position of Ethiopian women in relation to power was considered. TPLF promoted the full participation of women in public life. In fact, this could be seen as the story of feminism in one of the most "feminist" revolutionary guerrilla fighters' organizations: TPLF. Women were equal, were accepted in the struggle on an equal footing to men in theory, but only up to a certain point in practice. Tesfa's narrative seems to suggest that when women became too liberated and thus a little too assertive and started threatening the authority of men (who formed the majority of the leadership: 18 of the 19 members of the central committee were men), they had to be stopped, they had to be put in their place.

"Looking back, I think we were too radical in those days": Tesfa realizes their feminist position; however, she and her comrades were pushed into a defensive stance. As she says herself, "With regard to the feminist issue, we responded that we were not feminists but, rather, pragmatists". As we have seen, this argument is also reiterated by Lemlem. Tesfa, like Lemlem, is not

a dupe; they both understand the society they live in, and they believe that some people are not ready for theoretical debates, and hence they act accordingly. The pragmatic ways in which they act are not only a tactical issue but also a mechanism available in society. Can we hypothesize that the bold ways they adopted at the second conference in a way broke the subtle method of negotiation of power available in society? Without denying the effect or influence of patriarchy on the resistance exhibited by the leadership of TPLF, could the method rather than the outcome have had an influence on their decision to oust the assumed feminist women leaders of TPLF's women's organization?

To sum up, Tesfa places her experience of struggle in the context of the three successive regimes. In a few paragraphs, her narrative evolves and travels across time and history. As Siriphant (1996: 155) writes, "history of struggles told and retold through the personal narratives creates a sense of continuity of human action – a movement through time and history". Tesfa's introduction to social action through the Ethiopian Student Movement, her grasp of what is at stake and the extent to which she and the others were willing to go reflect the moment in time when a united force of youth demanded change and obtained it in the form of the Revolution that forced the collapse of the imperial system. This euphoria did not last long as her narrative progresses to the armed struggle that occurred when the Derg "aborted" or "hijacked"[59] the Revolution and forced the youth to resort to an armed struggle that lasted for 17 years. Armed struggle is not a new method that Ethiopians acquired through their initiation into Marxism, Leninism or Maoism but is embedded in the country's political culture. It should be noted that since at least the time of Emperor Theodros not a single government has come to power without an armed confrontation in Ethiopia.

Her life story is intertwined with the recent history of the country, to the point that one could be easily brought to confusion. Manning and Cullup-Swan (1994: 474) write that "content and narrative analysis struggle continuously with the problem of context or the embeddedness of text or story with

[59] While Tesfa used the term "aborted", Boge and Kalkidan used the term "hijacked" to describe the appropriation of the Revolution by the Derg.

personal or group experience". Tesfa's story is a good illustration of the embeddedness of context in a personal narrative, to the point that her narrative resembles the story of TPLF more than the individual experience of one woman within TPLF.

Rahel

The path to activism

In this extract, Rahel attempts a chronological narration of her path to activism, followed by part of her journey into revolutionary engagement. Three periods, her childhood and adolescence, her university and student movement phase, and her activist years back in revolutionary Ethiopia structure her narrative. However, as in the previous narratives, gender emerges as one of the themes. However, in Rahel's case, it is not her class background but rather the issue of gender that is raised in the introductory paragraph. As Rahel puts it,

> "in terms of my background, I was born in a family of four girls…we were raised the same way that young people would go through in any given family, fighting between us, but without experiencing the different kind of treatment between boys and girls and so on.

Different reasons could explain this choice: the purpose of the study, which focuses on women, and/or Rahel's feminist positioning that she wanted to clarify from the beginning. It is clear, though, that gender plays the key role of the linking thread of her narrative.

One of the first subjects that emerges from her formative years is the importance of education in her family and the role her father had in the process. "My father's principles were very simple. You have to get an education, that's what's going to get you ahead". Rahel supports her argument by giving two specific examples. The first, which is not directly connected to her but, rather, concerns her mother, nonetheless had a positive effect on her. Rahel applauds both her father's and her mother's attitudes towards education: her mother for her desire to continue her own education after marriage and, even more, her father for allowing it and supporting her mother's choice. Moreover, Rahel does not minimize her mother's contribution in instilling the values that govern their family either. By

her actions, which Rahel defines as defiant of the norms of the society she lives in, her mother became her daughters' role model, as she showed them in real life that they could become what they set their mind on being.

Rahel's testimony about her parents' supportive attitude towards their daughters' formal education is not only relevant to their personal character and values but also paints a certain picture of Ethiopian society. Both the father and the mother belonged to the pre-war generation and were likely to have been born around the 1920s and therefore raised in a traditional Ethiopia. It is interesting that, in a society that can sometimes be described as oppressive to women, they decided to send all their daughters to a private school, in this case Lycée Guebre Mariam. When Rahel's mother decided to continue her education, her father consented to her wishes, not necessarily because he was educated but perhaps because he grew up in a society that has historically accepted to a certain extent the idea of women's emancipation. Moreover, her mother's example shows that in this society women had access to certain liberties that they had negotiated throughout former times and which allowed them to navigate through the patriarchal system. Nonetheless, Rahel also argues that her mother "started a business at a time when women in her society, in her class and surroundings, were not allowed to go out and work". Where did this statement come from? Certainly, it is probable that a lot of women of "her class" in that era did not work, either in or outside the household: that is, that Rahel's mother, like the other women pioneers that we saw in the previous chapter, was in reality a pioneer in her field. However, the suggestion is that the statement that women were not actually allowed to work is erroneous and seems to have been based more on Rahel's Marxist view of women's oppression, since the time corresponds more to a period of intense westernization in which both men and women were adjusting to the lifestyle of the new modern Ethiopia.

The second example concerns the article she wrote in response to a Muslim woman candidate's programme for a parliamentarian election. Again, here her father's role is highlighted. Not only does he send his daughters to school, in a world where boys are sent to school more often than girls, but he also participates in the process of supporting them, as in this article, outside

the academic framework. Rahel acknowledges how this experience might subsequently have contributed to the raising of her consciousness about some of the issues related to women's needs and conditions. She clearly says that it helped her articulate these ideas, as she concludes "that must have been the grain, the seed that was in there".

From a historical perspective, though, this Muslim woman candidate's programme, in appearance conservative, resonates with "the fashion show crisis" that occurred in 1968. According to Balsvik (1985), in March of that year opposition to a fashion show organized by the university Women's Club at the Ras Mekonnen Hall, on the university's premises, grew into an unauthorized demonstration that led the university administration to close the university and dismiss the National Union of Ethiopian University Students (NUEUS) and the Union of University Students in Addis Ababa (USUAA), abolish *Struggle* and expel USUAA officers. Moreover "thirty-eight students were arrested, among them the USUAA president, the *Struggle* editor, and some members of USUAA congress" (Balsvik 1985: 218). Balsvik argues that although the anti-fashion show demonstration was more a pretext for protest against the government, and particularly a new policy, the Agricultural Income Tax Proclamation published in 1967, underneath lay "deeper layers of emotions" connected to the complicated relationship between the university's male and female populations" (p. 215). Through a review of opinions reflected in *News and Views,* the university newspaper*,* published in 1959–1966, as well as articles in *Struggle*, Balsvik depicts the difficult position of the first Ethiopian female students at the Addis Ababa University College. Despite the fact the first female student joined the university only a year after its establishment, the idea that higher education was not necessary for women and that university was not the appropriate place for them was widespread in the articles published in the early years of the university. Once it was established that female students were there to stay, the debate, writes Balsvik (1985: 57), moved on to their "passivity and lack of interest in all activities within the University". Nevertheless, in relation to the fashion show, the grievance of male students against female students is crystallized in what Walleligne Mekonnen wrote in *Struggle*:

> Our sisters' heads have been washed by western soap … Our sisters' feelings have been softened by western comfort … Our sisters' brains are totally filled with the wish to live the western kind of life … We want our sisters not to forget where they came from and to understand where they are and to think of where they are going … American philosophy of life leads us nowhere. (Cited in Balsvik 1985: 216, quoted in *Struggle* 1968, 6(3): 13–15)

Walleligne's tone, although conciliatory, is filled with condescension towards his "sisters'" ability to think and act in accordance with their own reflections and experiences. They are depicted as the unconscious victims of western culture and norms. According to Balsvik (1985), the male students assumed that it was up to them to enlighten women on the implication of their actions and, more importantly, raise their awareness of the issues that were more relevant to a poor society. Incidentally, this resembles one of the articles reviewed in the previous pioneer's chapter, which advised women to read more on world politics (*Ethiopian Herald* 1971) rather than worrying about rising prices. It seems that those who criticize the emancipation of women are often those who have received western education themselves. They seem to use their knowledge to reinforce local patriarchy by formalizing traditional norms that are discriminatory to women.

Unlike Sehin and Lemlem, Rahel underlines that her high school years made no contribution at all to her becoming an activist, as she and all the students of her school seemed shielded from and were oblivious to what was happening in the country. The only voice of the movement they were exposed to was that of their Amharic teacher, whose voice seemed too inaudible to provoke a reaction. Once at university in France, two separate and yet linked incidents seemed to have played a catalytic role in her path to activism: the emperor's birthday celebration and the 1973 famine. Her story of Haile Selassie's birthday allowed her to first confront her erroneous or partial view of Ethiopia and meet some of the well-known and articulate members of the ESUE. Her account of how she ended up writing a speech about the famine and delivering it to 2,000 people explains that it gave her the push she needed to eventually join the movement: she says

> So that was my baptism. From that moment on I think I was sort of empowered to speak in public and I felt very good about myself, it

> means I can do it too, I can convince people and talk about issues, and I have not stopped. So that's the beginning.

Her story about the speech is particularly interesting as it reveals the process of her transformation. It shows us how she overcame a shaky voice and a fear of public speaking to acquire the power of conviction. Hence this specific experience made her realize what she can do and is capable of.

Therein began the process of politicization. However, unlike with Lemlem, Rahel's path to activism seems based more on reflective decisions on her part as she highlights that the priority of her academic journey was that she did not want to disappoint her parents. Nonetheless, similar to the other women revolutionaries, she used that time to read and raise her consciousness before she slowly but surely joined the students union and started to participate in the study groups. Despite the fact that Rahel indicates in her narrative that she took her time to observe before joining the movement, she underlines the significance of the international context of that period, both in her personal journey and that of her comrades. In fact, in addition to the reading they did to raise their consciousness, all the revolutionaries insist on the effect of the international context on their politicization process. The stories about her trips to Berlin and her descriptions of the Berlin universities, then and 20 years later, shed light on the context and their frame of mind. Whatever political organization they belonged to, their admiration for their idols such as Angela Davis, Che Guevara and Malcolm X illustrate the global agenda of different movements for structural change. Moreover, similar to Lemlem and Tesfa, she cannot but give emphasis to the role that idealism played in the political activism of that period. As can be seen with the example of Meles and his comrades, who opted to go into the bush rather than continuing their higher education, the time was for collective action rather than individual growth.

Finally, before she finished university and returned to Ethiopia, she managed to find a way to reconcile both her student responsibilities and her activist ambition by joining the women's wing of the ESUE. Hence, she shares the story about the subordinate/secondary position of women's organizations within the bigger student movement. Unlike Lemlem's narratives, what

emerges from Rahel's account is not the chauvinist attitude of the male members of the bigger organization but, rather, the division between the female members defending the different positions reflected within the student union. In other words, Rahel observes a division between those who would become EPRP or Meison members/sympathizers. They had one thing in common, though: they all wanted to control the women's wings, not primarily to defend the status of women in Ethiopia but rather to defend the position of their respective groups.

Rahel reaffirms her position, which gives priority to women's issues, as opposed to the class issue, which was prioritized by the opponents that she names. However, her narrative about her position as a Meison sympathizer seemed rather ambivalent. Nonetheless, she tells us how, with the help of three of her friends (French friends who were external to or non-members of the Ethiopian students union), she managed to take the position of head of the women's league. Hence, in this way she walks us through her passage from a passive to an active participant in the process, describing what being an activist in ESUE entails in general, and in its women's league in particular. Her narrative is stimulating as she takes us backward and forward through different periods to illustrate what activism meant then and what it means today. While the place of ideology, and the notion of collective action, seemed to define the activism of those revolutionary days, Rahel foresees a shift of paradigm based on the new technologies in the activist world of today. In a sense, she seems to argue that activism is still alive, not necessarily as it was once known, but rather in a different form. "The operational side of activism is going to be very different. The motivation of activism is still going be justice," explains Rahel.

The return to Ethiopia marks the third period of her account. She finished her studies, and even renounced an opportunity for further education in order to come home and, finally, participate in the Revolution. However, right away she realized that her hopes would eventually turn into illusions. She describes her return, at that moment in time when the country seemed chaotic and in turmoil. She adds that this put the existence of the movement in jeopardy. She does not tell us the year of her return but, as is often the

case in our participants' narratives, she refers to an event that seems to mark the beginning or the end of something. Rahel's marker is thus Fikre's death: "Fikre has just been killed," she says. Fikre Merid was a senior member of Meison who was assassinated in September 1976. As some have written, this moment in time marked the start of what would later be known as the "Red Terror".

Nevertheless, Rahel remained in the country and was hired by the MoUDH, where she was given the responsibility of organizing the women in the urban sector. She shares with us what she came to realize in the short time she worked there. Again, what is revealed about the conditions of women during this period is highly similar to what we have heard from some of Rahel's successors. What she is talking about, and what has not changed much, is the economic and/or social status of women in Ethiopian society. As she clearly states, it was not the time to talk about their strategic needs but, rather, their basic needs. Hence, she confirms to us the limits of the socialist analysis of the women question, based on class and economic empowerment. Nonetheless, her role was to organize them; therefore, she tells us what she did. However, she admits that she did not have time to do much. But her observations seem valid as they are confirmed by some of the narratives. Lemlem's story about how they tried to infiltrate the women's committee of the *kebele* structures, to recruit for women members for their party (EPRP), seems to accord with Rahel's observation.

Conclusion

To sum up, the revolutionaries' descriptions of their activism are consistent with McAdam's (1986) account of high-risk/cost activism. Revolutionaries' accounts of the different factors in the recruitment process more or less conform to McAdam's model of recruitment to high-risk/cost activism. While ideological underpinnings reinforce the activists' attitudinal affinity to the cause of an organization, the availability of structures facilitates their integration into activist networks. Moreover, the activists' experience in the student movement provides the third factor, which is a history of activism. And finally, the age of the activists, who were in most cases university students or young professionals between the ages of 15 and 30, fulfils the

remaining factor, which is the absence of personal constraints on participation. Lemlem's narrative explicitly refers to EPRP's request for them to "cut family ties" in order to become the revolutionaries they had set out to be.

With regard to the question of feminism, the revolutionaries' analysis of the oppression of women or the "woman question" is informed by Marxist analysis as construed in Russia and the Eastern European countries. Hence, the revolutionaries recognize the "double oppression of women" and the triple role of women as "wives, mothers, and producers" in Ethiopian society (Dereje, 1981).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Narratives of the negotiators

This chapter aims to capture how negotiators perceive, reflect and act with regard to gender relations. Hence, it exposes the relationship between their lived experience and the current framework of gender discourse. Similar to the previous chapter, I have selected four negotiators to illustrate the different paths of gender activism. Similar to what was seen in chapter four, while all the negotiators of the study directly or indirectly promote gender equality, their narratives reveal a variety of profiles representing different point of interests as well as approaches to defending the cause of women. Again, to reduce arbitrariness, I have used age, profession and approach or entry point to gender activism as selection criteria.

The first two negotiators are among the founding members and/or executive directors of NGOs dedicated to women's issues. Almaze is the oldest; she represents women activists who were born and raised and who joined the workforce during the imperial regime. Moreover, she is also among those who took the opportunity presented by the 1994 Constitution to establish an NGO, which clearly strategized economic empowerment as the entry point for gender equality.

On the other hand, Ababa grew up under the military regime and joined the workforce as an assistant judge in the early days of the establishment of the current government, which overthrew the Derg. She is among those negotiators who adopted the rights-based approach to improving the social, economic and political conditions of women. In terms of feminist positioning, both recognize inherent feminist principles in the foundation of their organizations; however, while Almaze clearly states that she is a feminist, Ababa does not.

The two remaining activists, Alem and Mulatwa, are gender experts who were both working for international NGOs at the time of the interview. While both joined the workforce during the current period, Alem, who undertook her undergraduate and graduate studies in India, is a few years older than

Mulatwa, who is the youngest of all the activists in this study. Moreover, while Alem's education in development studies, particularly in the agricultural sector, put her in close contact with rural women's productive life and the consequences of harmful practices in general, Mulatwa's legal experience and specialization has directed her more towards the challenges of women in their private lives, and specifically issues related to domestic violence against women and divorce settlments.

Almaze

The path to activism and the influence of private lives

Almaze's life story narrative walks us through the last three regimes. Almaze was born and raised during the emperor's regime. She attended the girls-only Etege Menen School, headed by one of our pioneer woman W/ro Senedu Gebru. However, despite her intellectual capacity to continue in the academic field, she had to transfer to another high school where she had access to the commercial sector, from which she could graduate with a professional diploma. Later, she was able to join the workforce at the Addis Ababa University, which allowed her to continue her higher education. The Derg period, during which her academic and professional development at Addis Ababa University took off, is neither described nor mentioned. Her narrative of that period focuses solely on her personal life and career. Then came the new transitional government that removed the Derg from power and forced Almaze onto a new path. That could be the reason she started her narrative by declaring "I do not remember anything in my childhood that contributed to my present situation. I believe that the fact I am here today in this situation is chance".

Hence, Almaze stepped onto the path to activism by "chance". What she calls chance could possibly be described as opportunity. As seen in her narrative, Almaze entered the NGO world after she and some of her colleagues were dismissed from their leadership positions by Addis Ababa University, where she had worked/studied for more than a decade. She seems to believe that, had she not been fired, she would have continued her career in that institution. However, she was forced to leave and look for a new opportunity elsewhere. She tells us also how challenging getting a new

job was for her and her colleagues, since no organization wanted to hire them for fear of establishing poor relations with the new transitional government. Her story seems to indicate how wary the different institutions were to take that risk and hire those few individuals.

Subsequently, she was hired by an international NGO, thereby started her path to activism. She spent four years at this NGO as an HR director, working on projects that allowed her to observe and learn about life in rural Ethiopia in general and women's everyday "burdens" in particular. Having been raised in Addis, she was aware of some of the hardships that urban women like her mother went through but ignored the situation of rural women. Thus, we can argue that the opportunity to become an activist was created by both structural and personal circumstances. On the structural level, with the arrival of the new transitional government, the NGO sector that existed mostly in the form of relief-focused organizations during the Derg period saw a new development. Hence, while some NGOs started to add a rights component to their missions, others were established as development-oriented and/or rights-based organizations. It is in this context of the proliferation of local grassroots and/or NGOs that her NGO was established with the financial and moral support of the international NGO she worked for, which is itself dedicated to, among other issues, human rights.

On the personal level, Almaze's history seems to have contributed to her sensitivity to the condition/status of women in general and of poor women in particular. "What I remember is, however, seeing the hardship my mother went through to take care of us. That has made me realize the sacrifices and responsibilities assumed by women in general and mothers in particular". On the one hand, we have the recurrent figure of her mother, who seems to symbolize the economically disadvantaged urban woman that Almaze lives to serve. She tells us about her mother, who, despite being illiterate, was strong and wise, and who, despite her social status and economic difficulties, was able to raise and educate all her children. Hence, Almaze had first-hand experience of what it was like to grow up in a single-headed household, with no father as a provider. On the other hand, Almaze's short-lived marriage with an abusive husband could have also contributed to her understanding of

women's lives and power relations in the domestic sphere. If she, a professional woman, an economically independent woman, was subdued and abused by her partner, how could a poor woman stand up for her rights? Once again, Almaze had a role model to help her make that difficult decision: her mother. If her mother could do it, with her limited resources, so could she. Therefore, we can argue that, despite Almaze's doubts about her childhood experiences contributing to who she is today, her narrative seems to indicate otherwise as she grew up watching what she called her "role model": her mother.

As Almaze started her journey into her new activities within the NGO sector, so began the process of the raising of her consciousness. In order to walk us through this process, she appeals to a retrospective analysis of her professional and personal experiences from a feminist perspective. Thus, Almaze reassesses her professional journey within the Addis Ababa University through a gender lens. First, she shares with us her views about "token women" in organizations. In so doing, not only does she expose the subtle face of gender discrimination, she also conveys the message that the personal achievement of an individual woman is not good enough if millions live in a perpetual state of poverty and misery. Here it should be noted how a Marxist perspective slides into her analysis of her situation; Lemlem used the same type of argument to explain why she chose to get involved in the revolutionary movement instead of continuing her education to support her mother. Almaze also shares how she attempted to correct the absence of women from leadership or managerial positions by actively selecting women professionals to be part of her team. Her narrative of this experience seems to indicate that, as well as being victims of institutionalized discrimination, women are victims of themselves, as they keep a "low profile", effectively decreasing their chances of promotion. The question is, what made her different from these women? Again, can an argument be made that perhaps women like her appeal to the wisdom inherited from the hidden history of resistance that women from former times waged against the patriarchal order? Women like Almaze's mother have existed and continue to exist even today. They certainly did not acquire their strength or wisdom from modern

education. As Almaze has argued, her mother was not educated – that is, she did not receive any western education, and thus she was raised in traditional Ethiopia. However, she was described as wise, and able to raise her children alone without the assistance of their father. Often, women who raise their children single-handedly are seen as the exception. Often, their strength and wisdom is downplayed, leading to an emphasis on their weakness and "ignorance" (read: lack of western education). In this way, they are portrayed as victims who are not able to challenge and change their situation. Almaze's mother might not have worked to improve her life, but she made sure that her children would get a proper education so that they would have a better life than she had had. She was not a victim but a proactive person who has contributed to her children's present situation. "I had my mum's support. She was my role model, she was courageous, and that helped me stick with my decision". Almaze acknowledges that she finds her mother's "resilience" inspirational, but without connecting it to her own activist life. Moreover, all her previous experiences and the choices she made, both at the university and in her marriage, are put in the background. Instead, she attributes the process of her awakening to her first employment in the international NGO. She believes it contributed to the consciousness-raising process by offering an environment that was conducive both to observing and working towards the improvement of women's lives. The suggestion is that sometimes the activists themselves downplay or highlight certain aspect of their trajectories due to their perceptions, informed by their "new knowledge base", which tend to downplay what is inherent in them: their wisdom inherited from previous generations of women. Most often they attribute their strengths to either their education or their professional experiences in the NGO sector, while taking for granted what created their predisposition to becoming who they are today in the first place – that is, the wisdom they inherited from the experiences of previous generations of women who resisted patriarchy. That wisdom or know-how is embedded in habitus.

Again, Ethiopian women are oppressed by the patriarchal structures, but, as is the case for Almaze's mother and Almaze herself, women have resisted, if

not collectively, then individually, in the choices they have made in their everyday lives. Almaze is aware of her own achievement. She does not minimize it. However, she realizes that her personal achievement is worthless if she does not contribute to the improvement of women's lives in the country. According to her, the "entry point" to women's empowerment is through economic power. That is what her organization was designed to achieve. It allows poor women financial independence through self-employment in home-based production and micro-scale trading activities. In order to do so, the NGO provides women with access to resources,[60] services and information; it also gives poor women and girls various types of capacity-building training, including the "transformational leadership" course that Almaze mentions in her narrative. In fact, before the new NGO law, their handbook included life skills courses/training in what was then called "gender and family law", which also addressed all the HTPs. As Almaze explains later in the narrative, "we had discussions on them, and the women would bring up subjects like domestic violence themselves, because that is part of their life". However, the NGO had to adapt to the new NGO legislation, as rights issues could only be raised and brought up by local/Ethiopian NGOs. The implication is that her organization was forced to revise its training manuals in accordance with the new law and focus on issues related to development. Consequently, the transformational leadership course, the Family Conversation Day and Husbands Day, etc., filled this gap and created a space where the power relations of the domestic sphere could emerge in the group discussions. In this way, the NGO managed to offer women the space to talk about these issues relevant in their everyday lives without breaking the law and without threatening existing family units. In other words, if we take the Family Conversation Day, for example: it included not only the nuclear family – father, mother and children (over 18 in this case) – but also any extended family living in that household. Subsequently, the NGO avoided one of the criticisms made of many "feminist" organizations, which is that they are the instrument of "broken-up families and marriages". Avoiding direct criticism of the traditional family, which in this context is still the "basis"

[60] The NGO has savings and credit cooperatives, so poor women are directed to these services in order for them to get started with their projects.

of community structures, is a conscious and practical choice that women activists like Almaze make because the everyday challenges of poor women are overwhelming. As a result, it seems that navigating between practical basic needs and strategic basic needs becomes the norm.

The same can be said for the Husbands Day. Most of the women in this study, particularly those who have worked at EWLA or whose activism focuses on women's rights, said that they have been accused of encouraging women to leave their husbands (Lemlem, Ababa, Fawsia, etc.). They argue that most people had the misconception that they (the women activists) were all unmarried or divorced, which in most cases was not true. In this research alone, 15 of the 19 women have been married at least once; of the 15, only three are divorced, with two being widowed. Hence, only four women have never been married or had children of their own. However, perceptions of women activists being unmarried women who could not find a husband, or divorced women, persist in people's imaginations imaginery. Again, women activists like Almaze have to be pragmatic and do their jobs creatively, avoiding controversies. Therefore, in reality, not only does Husbands Day solves domestic problems that the NGO members are facing in their everyday lives, it also contributes to the deconstruction of the belief system underlying people's perceptions, in this case their gender constructions.

Ababa

The path to activism

In the first paragraph of her narrative, Ababa introduces herself. She tells us about her family's composition. She is the third girl in a family of four siblings, three girls and a young boy, all raised by their mother. She attended the Cathedral Girls School, a Catholic school. Hence, with this information, Ababa tells us about her social background and gender perspectives. In other words, she comes from a middle-class background and was raised in an environment supportive of girls' education.

> So I was not raised in an educational environment where boys and girls went to the same school, therefore I don't know that much about the differences about all these issues. My mother raised us. I believe

> that my mother was a strong woman. I can also say that I never got the idea of a man being better than a woman.

She highlights the role of her mother in her upbringing. Similar to Almaze, Ababa was raised by her mother. In addition to her caregiving role, her mother seems to have transmitted some of her strength and her values (such as the equality of the sexes) to her daughter(s).

Then we follow Ababa as she tries to understand where her activism, which she describes as a passion, a need, or something that comes from within, originated from. She continues her quest by appealing first to her childhood memories, bringing up the specific story of the "king"[61] of the group and how she resisted this concept, which implies the existence of inequality among her peers. In this way, she traces back her rejection of what she perceived as unfair or unjust. She also recalls the consequence of her resistance: being excluded from the group. Hence, from that time on, Ababa's story seems to suggest, she learned to stand up for what she believed was right, no matter what the consequences were. Thus, by the mere fact of bringing up this specific story, she connects her activism to her personal character, a personal character that never allows unfairness to pass without asking "why?". However, she does not limit the source of her activism to that, as she goes on to describe the opportunities that put her in the path of activism.

After finishing law school at Addis Ababa University, she was appointed as an assistant judge. What characterizes her new employment is the timing. Ababa grew up in Addis Ababa during the Derg period, but by the time she began her new job, EPRDF, which deposed the Derg and formed a transitional government, had started the process of prosecuting the former government officials. "That was still simple work. But when I went to the prosecutor's office, I had a chance to see the very vast crimes and the crimes of human rights violation that were committed by the Derg regime, which I did not know much about because I was a kid then". Thus, despite the gravity of the crimes she encountered, the process gave Ababa the opportunity to learn what really happened during that period of the Red

[61] Here, Ababa talks about being king rather than queen; this can be considered as an indication of the interiorized gender prioritization instilled in Ethiopian children's minds.

Terror, which she never mentioned by name. Consequently, this started off Ababa's passionate but very strenuous journey to consciousness. Ababa again refers to her memories of the Derg period in remembering some of the events that she recorded from testimonies of the victims' families and relatives. But she seems to have come up short, as all she remembers are fragments of events, such as the atmosphere of terror of the time, the lack of freedom, etc.; these generalities that she remembers are ones she might have heard or read about over time. However, she walks us through the process of her realization: first, the shock of coming to terms with the amplitude of the crimes, the questioning of human nature, the systemic nature of the crimes, and last but not least the crimes themselves: "mass crimes, human rights violation in its worst form, it gave me a glimpse of that time", concludes Ababa.

Therefore, her law background, conjugated with this process of prosecution, provided Ababa with a platform, whereby she consciously stepped onto the path of activism. Because, as she tells us herself, "I could not do them as just a lawyer or as a professional, I started looking at the cases as an activist. So when people came to testify and talk about it, I lent them an ear, I did not just write what they said". What could she do as an individual in order to ensure that history did not repeat itself? She listened with empathy and recorded and documented testimonies to the best of her abilities. This was a difficult task, particularly for a young person who had just come out of university and begun her first job. But she persisted while others left. She stayed until the end of the process. That was an experience that had a marked and lasting effect on her, which in her case, effectively contributed to who she is today.

Finally, the last element or circumstance that pushed her into activism is her connection with EWLA and subsequently her position as the first executive director of the one of the NGOs that was established with the support of EWLA. Ababa, who contributed to the establishment of this local NGO in 2003, continues to lead the organization today. Similar to Fawsia's organization, Ababa's NGO was created to respond to various needs identified after the protest march against domestic violence in 2001. Hence,

one way of responding to those needs was the provision of structures in which women could organize, advocate, mobilize and eventually form networks to resolve some of their challenges. As one of the first rights-based structures founded during the current period, EWLA not only opened the door for others to follow suit, but also served as a model organization. As result, the NGOs and other grassroots women's organizations established since then have provided Ababa and a few other women with the platforms or structures through which they could translate their passion or need (for change) into activism.

Consequently, we can argue that different factors that emerged from her narrative explain her path towards activism, including personal, political and historical or social factors. In other words, while her personal character and experiences made her susceptible or receptive to social action, the political opportunity provided by the process of prosecution of the Red Terror perpetrators, and opportunities created by women's organizing, pulled her into action. Accordingly, Ababa's case seems to conform to McAdam's (1986) model, which suggests that both psychological and structural factors contribute to a person becoming an activist.

When defining what can be described as women's activism in the Ethiopian context in Ethiopia Ababa suggests "so your role is simple in this: advocate, mobilize, make your voice heard. Use every opportunity to create and make an agenda out of it. Anyway, you always need to be present". Hence, through some specific examples, she describes some of the aspects of her activism and the challenges she encounters. The Kamilat case is a criminal case of a violent act committed against Kamilat by a man (who claimed to be her boyfriend) in 2006. Women's organizations such as EWLA, and other similar organizations responded by mobilizing, signing petitions and organizing protest movements including a demonstration and candlelight events at the hospital she was treated. While this was the response from the women's organizations, Ababa's narrative highlights the different challenges with which she was confronted. Her frustration was not provoked by the rumours that circulated, over which she had no control, but rather by the reaction of the high-ranking woman official who was tempted to believe the

rumours alleged to justify this criminal act.[62] Ababa was shocked and then revolted by what she heard. Hence, sometimes, the challenge comes not from any layperson but rather from women working within or around the circle of women activists. This is a part of the problem that women activists such as Ababa are faced with in their everyday activism.

The second example illustrates the mechanism that fosters the marginalization of women's issues in policymaking. Ababa was on the civil society committee working on designing the poverty reduction policy. As she said, she was not there to contribute on the general issue of poverty reduction, but rather to represent women's interests in that specific policy. Nevertheless, more often than not we see these issues reduced to a few lines in official reports. As Ababa argues, one has to always be present, occupy that space, and make women's voices heard. Moreover, Rahel's narrative (in chapter six) of her experience within the UNDP corroborates Ababa's statement about the marginalization of women's issues and/or gender in different institutions, which seems to suggest and confirm the structural character of the subordination of women in the public sphere.

Moreover, Ababa's narrative sheds light on the underlying perception of what a woman's character should be, with the comment she received on her behaviour: "you are too demanding, just loosen up a bit". As highlighted in Tesfa's narrative of her experience within TPLF, and Lemlem's within EPRP, the perception of women's submissiveness as opposed to men's chauvinistic position continues to persist in the social consciousness of Ethiopian society. Women who speak up are seen as nuisances, Ababa's experience tells us. Again, this is a challenge because it implies that women representatives, who could potentially defend women's interests in parliament, also seem to have integrated this submissive attitude, consequently continuing the vicious

[62] Incidentally, I had a similar experience myself at one of the candlelight vigils; one of the volunteer lawyers who provide legal counsel at EWLA reiterated the same excuse, that Kamilat should not have taken his money. I was also shocked, since first there was no evidence that Kamilat took his money, and even if she did he had no right to disfigure her as he did. Hence, if these two women who work in women's circles could reason this way, it is not surprising to hear the same arguments reiterated in the media.

circle of oppression, making them “collaborators” in a system that marginalizes women.

The theme that we have seen emerge in most of the narratives, and which re-emerges in Ababa’s on two occasions, is violence against women. The first time is in relation to the Kamilat case, when Ababa illustrates the kind of activism that her organization performs, and the second is when she reaffirms the need for local/Ethiopian NGOs, working for and defending the legal rights of Ethiopian women. The violence committed against women did not stop with Kamilat; on the contrary – it seems to have skyrocketed since. Indeed, this could have been in part the result of high level of media coverage (including on social media) and reporting of violent crimes. One recent crime that created public outrage and mobilization of women’s organizations is the Hana Lalengo rape case (Video 2015). Hana Lalengo was a high school student who lived in Addis Ababa. She was going home from school when she was kidnapped by a group of young men who were in the minibus she took. She was found a few days later lying on the street, practically unconscious, and taken to hospital. She had been repeatedly gang-raped. A few days later, after testifying to police, she died in hospital.

Alem

Identifying gender issues and the prevalence of violence against girls/women

Right from the start, Alem tell us that she does not know much about all those movements. In fact, Alem grew up during the Derg period. She went to a private Catholic school until she finished high school and then to India to continue her higher education. Like Ababa, she was raised in a protective and supportive environment, where she was able to have a normal middle-class childhood. By the time she was in elementary school all the movements that had rocked the lives of many young Ethiopians had quietened down. The Derg had won and life in the totalitarian military regime had taken its course. It is in this context that both Ababa and Alem grew up. Hence, it is not surprising to hear them say they didn’t know much about or they were not conscious of these movements. As seen previously in Ababa’s narrative, the nature of the regime did not allow people to talk about it, let

alone make their children aware of what happened to the different parties that fought against the Derg, or what they stood for.

> I think I became conscious after I came back from India; that is, after I finished my studies. All these issues such as excision, early marriage and abduction, I learned about these in my twenties when I came back to the country. I think that our conscious level is different, the same with the next generation, I don't know how it works.

Once Alem has clarified her lack of awareness of the movements that occurred "then", she goes back to her childhood days to explore the factors that may have contributed to who she has become today. Hence, she traces it first to the socialization process within her family. Alem's narrative reveals, in addition to her privileged background, her parents' beliefs, principles and values. Her father particularly stands out as he is mentioned several times to illustrate different values that had an effect on his daughter's life. He is described as a "modern" father who was ahead of his time, who cooked for them and encouraged his daughters and sons equally to excel in the kitchen as well as everywhere else. As Alem says, "I remember he always used to tell us, you can do anything you want. You can get to where you want. I think that was it for me".

While her father set an example for both his sons and daughters by his presence in the home, her mother shone by her absence from it. That by itself showed Alem and her siblings other possibilities. It showed them that their mother was an independent woman, who worked, interacted in the public sphere as any man could do, and socialized with her friends. And it also showed them that there was no contradiction in her being mostly outside and their father inside the household. Consequently, what Alem identifies as a "role reversal" seemed to have had a positive effect for them, as it allowed them to grow up in a household where what are perceived as "traditional gender roles" were not respected, which subsequently allowed them to see the flexible nature of gender. Nonetheless, it should be noted that what are described as "traditional gender roles" in this case are debatable. What Alem is referring to as traditional gender roles are based on a presumed division of labour, which assigns women to the private sphere to take up the domestic and caregiving roles of the household, in this case

doing what Alem's father was actually doing, taking care of her children and teaching them how to cook, etc., instead of playing the role of the provider, who is usually absent from household activities. Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter four, in Ethiopia, the division of labour by gender is not clear-cut. In other words, the gendered division of labour in the private and public sphere as assumed by Alem is not accurate. Certainly, the majority of Ethiopian women assume the caregiving and domestic role but they have traditionally worked and continue to work outside the household. Hence, while in rural Ethiopia women's participation in agriculture is still high (Dessalegn 1991), in urban areas women's participation in the informal sector remains significant.

The other outcome of this experience, or the underlying value conveyed by Alem's parents' way of raising their children, is the equality of the sexes. Hence, Alem seems to suggest that her growing up in a family where there is equality between boys and girls and equal opportunities are offered has some effect on who she is today. Evidently, things were different outside the home, starting with the streets, where a girl could be harassed and targeted. Before she went to India for her university education, apart from her own experience with a street thief or that of the other two girls she mentioned in her narrative, her knowledge of women's or girls' oppression seems to have been limited. However, interaction with the outside world, first with her the school friends and later with different communities in India, started the awareness-raising process on the conditions of women in general and specific issues in particular. Two issues that affected Indian women/girls or female babies, such as arranged marriages and infanticide respectively, emerge from her stories of her time in India. At first her protected childhood experience led her to think, naively, that at least such things did not happen in her country. As she started to be exposed to more lives/experiences/cultures through her development studies, she realized her ignorance on many issues and most specifically on the realities of women's lives in Ethiopia. In fact, she is not the first of the participants of this study to admit a lack of knowledge on the conditions of Ethiopian women in general and rural women in particular. Kalkidan, one of the revolutionaries, who grew

up during the imperial period and, incidentally, went to the same school as Alem, has shared with us that she had to return home from the United States after her first degree to work in rural Ethiopia in order to learn and understand women's lives. Similarly, after her exposure through education, Alem has come to the same conclusion – that is, go to rural Ethiopia to learn and understand Ethiopian women's lives. Accordingly, we can see two outcomes that were the fruit of her education and experiences in India, the opening of her eyes on the subordinate position of women in many countries including Ethiopia, and subsequently the realization that "this does not have to be". It should be noted that for both Kalkidan and Alem, their assumption of what real Ethiopian experience is lies in and is connected to how people live and act in rural Ethiopia. The implication is that the experiences of those who live in urban areas have gone through some modification. Therefore, their way of life is not representative of what they (Kalkidan and Alem) perceive as Ethiopian. Hence, their perception itself is biased, as if the life and cultural norms of traditional Ethiopia represented by rural Ethiopia are static, unchanging and pure. By extension, they present themselves as un-Ethiopian, attributing the way they think and act to education and/or exposure to other cultures. Again, they seem oblivious to what they may have inherited from the experiences of previous generations of women, the wisdom inherent in their cultural background, which could have contributed to their predisposition to think and act the way they do. All that is good, such as Alem's parents' role reversal in the household and their attachment to the equality of boys and girls, is perceived as "modern": considered to have been acquired through modern education, or imported from western culture, and thus foreign to traditional Ethiopia. There is no denying that they are informed by what they have acquired or learned through the "formal education system" they went through; however, there seems to be a systematic denial or downplaying of what could have come from what is thought of as traditional Ethiopia. Alem and Kalkidan could have been raised by parents who were exposed to western education and culture, but their parents were most probably raised by people who grew up in traditional Ethiopia, and the western influence is too recent to influence attitudes so profoundly in only a few generations' time. The suggestion is that, in addition

to Alem's parents' attitudes and attachment to the notion of equality between the sexes, Alem's attitudes are not solely informed by recently acquired western principles; they emanate from centuries of both hidden and unhidden power struggles that have occurred in this society.

Work in an international NGO gave Alem the opportunity to do what she set out to do – that is, start her education – despite the different issues faced by Ethiopian women. The first example she gives is specific and complex; it raises the issue of a caste system in one of the southern regions in Ethiopia. In this region, she describes how a whole community is ostracized, and believed to have the evil eye (this concept is based on the power to cast a spell that some people belonging to this specific group are believed to have by other community members), which makes things even worse, both for the community and the women who have a subordinate position within it. Thus, just with this example, Alem depicts the effect of "intersectionality" (Collins, 2000; Brah & Phoenix 2004). On the one hand, the whole community is cast out due to ethnicity, occupation and local religion, Alem seems to say. Hence, they were discriminated against by the surrounding communities. On the other hand, the community itself has its own hierarchical order in which people are discriminated against by age, occupation, gender, etc. As Alem says herself, on the surface it might look like an economic issue, but it is more complicated than that. Within this community, women were confronted by a caste system themselves as they had to take themselves away from the community during certain periods, such as during menstruation or when they gave birth. In addition they have faced the HTPs practised by the wider communities in their area. In Ethiopia, the different regions of the country have their specialities; while circumcision or FGM is practised throughout the country, early marriage is prevalent in the Amara region, and abduction in the southern part of Ethiopia.

> And then you start to reconnect all those incidents, like the street harassment, etc., all those were manifestations of how violent a community could be, including the passivity, as the passer-by's look at you, not intervening when a guy grabs you without your consent

Hence, through a retrospective analysis of her lived experience, Alem illustrates how her education, then her exposure to rural Ethiopia through her

work, paved the way to her becoming an activist. In fact, throughout the narrative, Alem's reflectivity is displayed as she tries to connect the different incidents she has experienced in her life to what she has learned recently in her consciousness-raising process. For example, the constant references to lessons learnt from her father can be seen as proof of her reflexivity. That is followed by her step-by-step depiction of the unfolding of her feminist consciousness and how she thinks and acts through the different feminist issues she chooses to present. From the memories of the street thieves of her childhood and formative years, we can see the street harassment that women/girls (in this case in Addis Ababa) are confronted with in their everyday life. In her case, the harassment, which she previously viewed as a simple case of street theft, when seen from her new (feminist) perspective seems to have had a gender element as she connects it with the case of the two girls that she witnessed with her father. Moreover, the insult she received from the thief, *"derek*" (stubborn), indicates that he did not expect such resistance (we might say, from a girl) seems to affirm this interpretation. Nonetheless, the two points she wanted to make with this example were how these actions were a manifestation of the violence and also the passivity found in Ethiopian society.

The second issue that emerged from her narrative is the issue of violence committed against women. She seems especially concerned with this issue as she gives a few cases of violence that have occurred, both in Ethiopia and India, to illustrate the significance of this challenge in Ethiopia. At least in India people rise up together to demonstrate their outrage, Alem seems to think. In contrast, she was outraged and disappointed by the public reaction to these extreme cases of violence. Similar to Ababa and Lemlem, she is frustrated by the justifications that people, both men and women, seem to find to explain, if not excuse, these actions. She goes further in her argument and she highlights the double standard suffered by women, as she seems to think these justifications would never have been accepted if women had committed these crimes.

However, Alem does not simply question and comment on the way the society she lives in has treated women but also reflects on solutions. Hence,

in this extract she shows us how she reasons that if her father was able to act this way, there must be thousands like him. She therefore appeals to this sense of responsibility she witnessed in her formative years, to strategize and struggle against the violence committed against women. She underscores the role of the media to that effect while at the same time being wary of the double-edged outcomes of media use. Nevertheless she seems to believe that we have to understand the root cause of the problem, which she traces back partly to cultural practices. “The other problem also lies in our culture, a very strong culture. Can you defy a society, lift your head up high and live in that society? That is the greatest challenge”.

To illustrate the effect of culture, she takes the example of her own marriage. Here, Alem speaks of her mother’s request for her to have a marriage reception. Her mother, whom we have seen resisting assigned gender roles to some extent, both for her children and herself, is subject to the social pressure to have a reception. Both Alem and her mother understood the dilemma and tried to deal with it in their own way. However, if this independent and educated woman felt pressured to do what society (here, her friends) expected her to do, how could a woman/man or a family living in a “close-knit” community resist cultural norms, Alem seems to be asking. She underlines the discrepancy or the gap that exists between these more open urban, educated middle-class communities and the more or less close-knit, rural, and disadvantaged communities. Despite this contrast, cultural norms seem to affect them both in varying degrees.

Alem argues that the same rationale could explain some of the issues, related to “rape, spousal abuse”, domestic violence and/or HTPs. More specifically, she seems frustrated by this system of tolerance of such crimes transmitted from one generation of mothers to the next. She condemns this norm that teaches girls/women to endure (this “*chayiw*” concept), which is the advice given to women/girls who have the audacity to leave the marital home for one reason or another.

Mulatwa

At the time of the interview Mulatwa was the senior gender expert for an international NGO. I met Mulatwa while working at EWLA. She can be described as the go-between activist between the negotiators and a new upcoming group, the “Setaweets”, as she represents one of the two activists from the younger generation. In fact, as we observe in her narrative she shares some commonalities with this new generation of women (the Setaweet group) who proclaim and assume their feminist positioning. The suggestion is that her narrative seems to announce the emergence of a new group of activists, that could be categorized as the “successors” in future studies. She is also the niece of two revolutionary women, one of whom participated in this study.

In this extract, Mulatwa offers a chronological account of her journey into activism. Right from the first paragraph she sets the tone of her narrative by raising the issue of inequality between girls and boys as well as the issue of unmet basic needs that is prevalent in both rural and urban Ethiopia. Nevertheless, it is the different treatment of boys and girls that she observed in the household she was sent to live in that sows the seeds of resistance in her. She seems to suggest that this early childhood experience, and later the support and encouragement of her father, caused her to develop the individual characteristics of a fighter and, by extension, of an activist. “The biggest influence in my life is my father. I was raised by a single father.”

In fact, her father is present throughout her narrative. But it is particularly in her teenage years that he takes centre stage as he manages to provide a safe environment not only in terms of meeting her basic needs and education but also by stimulating her intellect through discussions of her readings. The involvement of her father in her readings and discussions is highlighted because, although encouraging one’s child to read and have discussions seemed an ordinary responsibility of a parent, she wanted to pinpoint that it is not always the case in Ethiopia. In other words, she wanted to show that despite social rules/norms that discourage children in general and girls in particular to intervene or participate in discussions with adults, by contrast her father encouraged her to do so. Hence, the second paragraph,

which is entirely dedicated to her father, describes a well-read man who is attached to egalitarian principles as well as non-violent attitudes. From her description of her father emerges the image of a devoted father with feminist values who was able to transmit these values to his daughter to the point where the characteristics of father and daughter seem to blend into each other. We can even push the similarities further and state that he is indeed her role model as his influences and contributions are inscribed on who she has become today.

With regard to her mother, Mulatwa seem to convey some kind of indifference towards her. “I didn't have much contact with my mum in my early years so I didn't know much about her beliefs. To be honest, I’ve never had much time with her, even up to now, so I don't know much”. The absence of a mother–daughter relationship is highlighted with a certain detachment. Nevertheless, Mulatwa uses a feminist perspective to understand and analyse her mother’s decisions and actions. The inference is that, despite growing up without a mother is unusual and difficult to say the least, she seems to give her mother credit for having the courage or audacity to leave two young daughters to continue her education, bending in this way the gender norms that impose the responsibility of child-rearing on mothers. It seems that Mulatwa’s feminist side applauds her mother’s perseverance.

Afterwards, Mulatwa moves on to her formative years; first she describes her high school years. Here again, her father’s open-mindedness and trustfulness is praised. Comparison is made to highlight her perception of what growing up in urban/middle-class Ethiopian families looks like, particularly in relation to gender: she seems to suggest that, unlike her father, her friends’ parents or families are quite vigilant over if not controlling of their children’s relationships with the opposite sex. Overall, she seems to have had happy teenage years in which she was able to explore and participate in different extracurricular activities. Hence, Mulatwa seems to believe that both the way she was brought up and, particularly, the liberal environment that her father was able to create for her allowed her to develop the self-confidence she needed to become who she is today. She concludes the paragraph with the following statement: “So there was no option in my

head that there were things I couldn't do because I was a girl. I felt I could do anything, and if I don't do something it is because I don't want to do it … have no interest to develop that skill."

The question is, what made Mulatwa the way she is? Is it solely due to the way she was brought up, by a father with liberal/progressive beliefs and attitudes? The most predictable assumption is that this could be the result of the westernization process that occurred in the country, since she was brought up by a father with modern education. Or, another, more subtle assumption is that there could be something in Ethiopian society that allows certain freedoms or liberties to women? Looking at the patriarchal structure that organizes Ethiopian society, is it conceivable to suggest that Ethiopian women do not see themselves as inferior to men, as opposed to men, who naturally assume a superior position? The suggestion is that, although Ethiopian society is certainly segregated by sex (Rahel, Lemlem, or Eshetu 2005; Biseswar 2011), the inferior status accorded to women in traditional/patriarchal societies is not as clearly defined as it seems to be. In other words, women's inferior position could be more debatable than it is assumed to be. In fact, the narratives of the participants of this study indicate a less static or more or less fluid location of women depending on different factors such as age, class and/or ethnic group. Here is how Rahel feels about women's location: "in Ethiopia, we women are free in our heads … in our heads we are independent. Inside we are equals". When making this statement Rahel was not only talking about herself but also about her mother, which implies that we are talking about at least three generations of women: the pioneers, represented by Rahel's mother and women like Senedu Gebru, the revolutionaries, represented by Rahel and her revolutionary comrades, and the negotiators, represented by Mulatwa.

With the university years, Mulatwa becomes aware of what she identifies later in the paragraph as sexual harassment. She gives us a depiction of what it was like for female students of her generation to join university. Similar to some of our other interviewees who completed their higher education in Ethiopia, Mulatwa went to Addis Ababa University. Similar to, for example, the narratives of Lemlem and Sehin, two revolutionaries, and of

Ababa, another negotiator, Mulatwa is confronted with this not-so-new phenomenon that seems to take on significant dimensions in the lives of female university students of the different periods. While Lemlem complained about how male students criticized the way female students ate and walked, and even the fact that they rejected potential boyfriends, Ababa talked about how female students were asked for a date through what she identified as "*lekefa".*[63] Mulatwa's narratives give details and show how deep-seated the issue of harassment is and how it translates into real life. Her testimony does not only reveal her disillusionment with university life – it also shows how demeaning it is in general for female students to be constantly exposed to such images for the years they spend on the benches of this academic institution. At least two similar reactions emerge from the narratives of those exposing this issue of harassment at Addis Ababa University. The first reaction is that of surprise or, even more, that of shock. The second reaction at least some awareness, which leads to some form of resistance, or, unfortunately, of resignation.

Several questions can be raised. Is the problem specific to this university? Or as some would say, are the boys just "being boys", and the female students are naïve or overprotected? For some reason, though, they seem never to have seen this coming and start to see it only when entering the university or, as seen in Alem's narrative, more and more in high schools recently? Nonetheless, while Mulatwa seems to have found some kind of an explanation or justification in the restrictive cultural norms by which boys and girls are raised in Ethiopia, Rahel attributes this violation of women's/girl's dignity to deeply anchored misunderstandings created by a more or less segregated society. She believes that "they [boys and girls] grew up together but that interaction does not necessarily involve sexual interaction or an understanding of what those relationships are because this dialogue has

[63] *Lekefa* could be addressing a person or trying to get his/her attention through a variety of means. It could be by calling her or him (sometimes inappropriate) names, or, as Mulatwa mentioned, touching the person, stopping them, and forcing them to talk or interact in one way or another. As Ababa argued, it could be used to get the attention of a female to ask her for a date, and it could be used just to make fun of or humiliate her. Nonetheless, in women's rights activists' lexicology "*lekefa*" is usually used to refer to or is associated with what is termed sexual harassment today.

never taken place, because that space never existed". Therefore, argues Rahel, people working on violence should try to fill the gap by creating a space where this dialogue could take place.

With regard to her activism, Mulatwa's narrative reveals at least four elements that led her to become an activist. First, we have the personal characteristics that she has been able to develop thanks to her father's encouraging role and commitment to principles of equality, tolerance and non-violence. Accordingly, she seems to suggest that this allowed her to acquire the spirit of a "fighter". Second, she seems to partly attribute her activism to what Kampwirth (2002) has identified as a "family tradition of resistance". She says "I was lucky enough to have very strong women in my family". Hence, growing up hearing the stories of her aunts and establishing a close relationship with one of them seems to have influenced her in her choices. "At the same time, it provided her with strong female figures who have become her role models. Seeing women who maintain their own ideology and make sacrifices for it is not a new concept to me. I have seen many who fought as hard as men." The third element, which was not planned but which created an opportunity for her to participate in collective action, is her choice to join EWLA. Finally, at EWLA she was able to engage professionally in and express her commitment to the causes that speak to her personally, particularly issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment and divorce settlement.

Mulatwa also shares her reflection on what she considers to be activism, and the different ways to be an active participant in today's Ethiopia. She talks about her experiences of both individual and collective action. While she appreciates the outcomes of her participation in and experience of collective action she seems to regret other people's commitment to short-term rather than long-term engagement in collective action. This has consequently led her to take a break and reflect on other forms of participation, particularly through the use of new technologies that have opened up new spaces for discussion through social media/networks: the new forum of social media/networks such as Facebook and/or Twitter has created a space for people like her to participate in discussions. This is what Rahel was talking

about when she argued “And there you look at Facebook and Twitter; all those young people are saying, what is going on … the operational side of activism is going to be very different. The motivation of activism is still going be justice”. Nonetheless, Mulatwa’s narrative also reveals the challenges of this new system. She describes some of the problems that could be an impediment for the development of activism through the use of these new media. “Everything goes to character assassination so fast, the message or the key issue is peripheral”. One of the reasons Mulatwa gives for the negative use of social media is the wariness both women and men have about “anything that talks about women or feminism”. The question is, what makes Ethiopian men and women so hostile to feminism?

What makes Mulatwa different from her predecessors or even from some of the negotiators is her feminist positioning. In fact, the story of the Setaweet coordinator wearing a T-shirt saying “This is what a feminist looks like” is quite revealing of women’s rights and/or simply women’s associations’ positioning in the Ethiopian context. Practically all the activists in this study, both from the revolutionary and present periods, currently work for or are associated with women’s organizations working on the improvement of the political, social or economic status of women. Hence, they could be described as feminist-oriented organizations. As Mulatwa puts it bluntly, “the educated people outside EWLA saw the organization as a feminist organization but people inside didn't see it as such”. She even enumerates some of the reasons why they do not want the “denomination” of feminism associated with them. The principal reason why women’s organizations reject feminism is because of some misconceptions and misunderstandings of the term; hence, they have an ambiguous understanding of what feminism is. For some, it is associated with being a lesbian. Here is how Yemesserach clarifies the roots of the problem:

> In my time we were talking about four kinds of feminism, liberal, socialist, radical and Marxist feminisms, and the radicals were associated with lesbianism, and their discourses on how they did not need men … so this created what is present in people’s minds, in effect creating some misrepresentations. And some of the women activists are also informed by these misconceptions.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that behind the misconceptions there seemed to be some kind of homophobia, amplified by the fact that in Ethiopia homosexuality is condemned by most if not all the dominant religions of the country. Moreover, it is still a criminalized act punishable by the law; thus, these two reasons partially explain why some of the women activists do not want to be called feminists. Although the misconceptions of the term play a significant role in most of the women activists' refusal to be called or labelled as feminists, some of them strategically abstain from declaring that they are feminists because they consider it an impediment to the advancement of their cause. Here is what one of the founders of EWLA, Lemlem, has to say about feminism:

> Honestly speaking, I have never called myself a feminist. It is not out of fear of being labelled a feminist but rather because I don't want to complicate issues … I know what happened when we started off with EWLA. We were treated as careerist women who were there to promote their own individual careers, single women who could not get themselves husbands, and we were organizing to destroy the marriages of others. No one wanted us to raise the issues of women, because they did not want women to say I have rights, I can do what I want.
>
> So we chose not to be confrontational about it. Not to talk about it but perform the actions supported by our research results. And getting other men to speak about and support our cause has also helped us proceed more easily. There are issues that we did not raise at first, like abortion, for example, because it was not the time**.** We wanted to deal with it once we had firmly staked our principles. Therefore, we started with issues such as rape, abduction, wife battering – even though they are still not punished properly, they have the merit of being included in the criminal code
>
> The second issue we did not raise – and responded that it was neither the time nor the place to talk about it – is the issue of homosexuality. Personally, I believe homosexuality can be categorized as a violation of human rights in the domain of individual rights, nevertheless it is still against the law in Ethiopia. Secondly, the public is not ready for it. People's sensitivity and attitudes against homosexuality were and still are very high. Moreover, we did not want the women's issues that we are fighting for to be pushed aside and forgotten for the sake of an issue that has the right to debated as a legal or human rights issue separately from women's rights, or feminist issues. This would have offered our opponents the opportunity to connect anything and everything to polemicize on each of our hard-won achievements.

Without denying the fact that a significant number, if not the majority, of the women activists refuse the feminist label due to an ambiguous understanding of the term in general and its association with homosexuality, this extract gives another viewpoint that certainly contributed to the rejection of the feminist label. It also offers a different perspective based on valid arguments rather than fear or rejection of diversity of sexual orientation. In this extract, we learn that some activists have strategically chosen not to claim feminism when in fact all their actions are based on a feminist agenda. Again, they seem to base their decision on their knowledge of the society they live in and act accordingly; the statement "we chose not to be confrontational about it" illustrates this point.

Conclusion

Up until the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation, the narratives of the negotiators indicate, the political environment was conducive to women's activism in relation to gender issues. Their narrative also suggests a low-risk but high-cost activism within civil society organizations, in which negotiators were engaged in the improvement of the political, economic and social conditions of Ethiopian women. With the creation of EWLA, followed by several other women's organizations, gender issues in general and those related to the private domain, such as abduction, early marriage and FGM in particular were put at the centre of the negotiators' collective action, in which the personal had indeed become political. On the other hand, maintaining the continuity of what was started by the pioneers, some negotiators would engage in more conventional feminist projects, based on the assumption that the entry point to women's emancipation is their economic empowerment.

As seen in their narratives, negotiators belong to different age groups and come from different backgrounds. While some have joined the activists' world late in their lives, some have come into it, either by "accident" or consciously, through employment opportunities opened up by the creation of women's organizations. Moreover, it appears that the causes defended by the negotiators differ and reflect their personal histories of activism, and different themes emerge from their narratives. While documenting women's contribution to society and the marginalization of women in different public

institutions were themes that preoccupied several of the negotiators, the different forms of *lekefa* (harassment) troubled most of them. Others highlighted the interconnected effects of poverty and gender discrimination on women in general and rural women in particular. In fact, despite the absence of rural women's narratives in this study, rural women appear to be present in the narratives of all the negotiators. For example, while Ababa emphasizes how the strength of rural women motivates her, Alem presents a concrete representation of this strength through her description of the experience of the woman coffee grower. Dinknesh (a negotiator whom we encountered in chapter four), who works with and within her community of origin on the particular issue of FGM, which she has undergone herself, tells us "I am them". Thus, women's strength and wisdom in general and that of individual mothers in particular are themes that emerged in most of their narratives.

Last but not least, both Alem and Mulatwa's testimonies of the role of fathers in their daughters' fulfilled activist lives should not be underestimated nor ignored.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Rethinking feminism in Ethiopia

Through exploration of the literature on the pioneers and the narratives of the revolutionaries and the negotiators, this chapter tries to trace Ethiopian feminism and capture how feminist consciousness has emerged among the Ethiopian women activists under study. Hence, in light of the literature review, this chapter examines the types of activisms the women practise and how their activism is connected to feminism. In fact, I argue that feminism is embedded in their activism. This argument is based on two assumptions. First, there is evidence that suggests that the existence of feminist activism is informed by the cultural, political and social positioning of Ethiopian women. And second, similar to their activism, their feminism is contingent on the political context and international/global influences.

I. Types of women's activism in Ethiopia

High-risk/cost activism: the emergence of the revolutionaries

The various studies of McAdam (1986, 1989) that emerged from the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project provide conceptual overviews relevant to this study. For example, concepts such as high-risk/cost as opposed to low-risk/cost activism demonstrate the existence of different kinds of activism that potential activists could embrace. As McAdam (1986) argues, these concepts also reveal the existence of diverse recruitment mechanisms/factors that relate to distinct forms of activism. McAdam (1986, 1989) and McAdam and Paulsen's (1993) global work explores how individuals become activists – that is, the beginning of the recruitment process. It also offers an overview of the consequences of an activist experience. This is done by studying how those involved in political action remain activists through the alteration or conversion process, and by demonstrating how the experience of high-risk/cost activism has influenced their future choices with regard to their professional and private life. Therefore, although McAdam's studies were conducted in a post-industrial and affluent society, the concepts seem to offer a global framework to

understand both the path and journey to activism of Ethiopian women who started their activist life during the 1960s.

The narratives of the revolutionaries illustrates how the women activists of "those hectic days" were vigorous participants in Ethiopian history, marked first by the student movement (1965–1974), and various protest events after the Revolution of 1974. Some had survived the Red Terror, which lasted from 1976 to 1978, and others had participated in the 17-year liberation struggles within various rebel movements. In this sense, I argue that the revolutionaries of these hectic periods were more engaged in high-risk/cost activism. Here is what Admas, a former EPRP member, has to say about their activism.

> It was a 24-hour commitment, you had to read a lot to raise your consciousness, participate in activities like cell formation for the structuring of your organization, it was non-stop. Because then you were young, you had the energy, and you were not afraid of death. We organized demonstrations, against all the odds, who cares? Most probably the older ones might have known the risks. It did not matter to us if we died.

Admas's description of their activism is similar to what McAdam (1986) classifies as high-risk/cost activism. The revolutionaries express strong commitment to their cause or, as McAdam (1986) argues, articulate grievances consistent with the ideology of the movement. They invested a lot of time reading revolutionary books, raising their consciousness both individually and collectively through small organized structures called cells, or study groups. Reading and discussions within cells played a significant role in their consciousness-raising process. Moreover, despite the meaningful role of ideology in the politicization process, opportunities or circumstances such as the *Edget Behebret Zemech* contributed as sites for politicization that eventually put the students on the path to high-risk/cost activism. Consequently, consistent with McAdam's approach, while the revolutionaries' strong ideological affinity with the causes of their respective groups served to "push" them into participation, the availability of micro-structures described as cells, or study groups, contributed to "pulling" them into the various organizations that reflected their values and principles. Additionally, it should be noted that Admas has a role model within her

family: her sister was among the leaders of the Ethiopian Student Movement; moreover, the fact that Admas's sister had been in prison during the emperor's era did not prevent her from being among those leaders engaged in the armed struggle against the military regime at a later stage.

Admas is one of the revolutionaries whose political consciousness was accelerated during the *Edget Behebret Zemecha*, in which she became one of the most vocal and articulate students of her camp, located close to Negele military camp. She said "Taye was a very reserved guy, was the thinker, the one who reasoned out our actions, I was like the activist, the mobilizer. Don't ask me how I did it, but it just happened". Her account of their activities is consistent with the mission of the campaign. The students did what they were sent to do, raising people's awareness of the newly acquired rights and establishing different peasants associations, including women's associations. The Development Through Cooperation campaign, some scholars affirm, was designed as a strategy to end student unrest that occurred in the urban areas, by sending the students across rural Ethiopia and in the process depoliticizing them. To some extent, the strategy seemed to work, not by stopping their politicization but rather by making them temporarily change sides. Genenew Assefa recalls that "we left-wingers had agitated against the Campaign, but the moment the Derg issued the rural land proclamation, all of us secondary school students turned pro-Derg … Later, secondary school students played a significant role in establishing Peasants Associations" (Bahru 2010: 139).

On other occasions, though, as was the case in Admas's *Zemecha* camp, the Derg strategy seemed to have failed and instead created the opposite effect. It is during this period that Admas dates her first imprisonment, along with two other comrades. The reason for their detention, which was a common theme in that period, was the students' stand for a civilian administration against the military rule imposed by the Derg. Admas and her comrades would be released due to their peers' protest and act of solidarity, which created a bigger movement that forced the military to concede on this occasion. Nevertheless, Admas, like some of the other students who felt the threat and did not trust the military, chose to flee from the campaign and

returned to Addis. Hence, Admas narrates that once she arrived in Addis she joined EPRP and "became a full-time activist".

As seen in the narratives of the revolutionaries, the end of the *Edget Behebret Zemecha* was followed by the high-risk/cost activism of the Red Terror years, in which the members of the various groups opposing the Derg – primarily EPRP – were forced to go underground and struggle against military tyranny. The accounts of the urban armed struggle and the Red Terror, in which a high number of the revolutionaries were imprisoned, tortured or killed, is therefore consistent with the scope of high-risk/cost activism.

Another engagement that follows similar patterns of the high-risk/cost activisms of the urban organizations opposing the Derg, at least in its first phase, is TPLF's struggle, which turned into a 17-year fully fledged armed struggle against the Derg. Hence, TPLF's struggle, based on shared ethnic grievance, brought together young men and women from the Tigray region. This established a strong identification with a project that went beyond opposition to the Derg to encompass the idea of secession. The particularity of TPLF and its fighters is that, unlike the members of the other opposition parties, such as EPRP and/or Meison, the majority of members of the organization consisted of people from rural areas, with limited exposure to education. As Woode and Aklile argue, "*yegebere ledjoch nene*" (we are from an agrarian background, or we are children of farmers). And yet they were highly politicized through different methods. Woode and Aklile remember how the songs and poems written to the glory of the first Weyane[64] were effective in pulling them in to the movement. In recalling and glorifying the actions of the first Weyane, TPLF was strategically re-establishing the history of resistance of the Tigrayan people against the central government (dominated by the Amhara during the emperor's regime). The storylines, based on the actions of a central government that killed the sons and daughters of Tigrayan people in the Red Terror, combined with previous grievances of Tigrayan national discrimination, contributed to

[64] Tigrayan peasant protest against the central imperial regime in the 1940s.

TPLF's winning the sympathy and eventually the support of the majority of Tigrayan peasants.

With regard to the participation of women in the struggle over the years, the women fighters in the TPLF made up more than 30% of its total number of combatants. The narratives of the three TPLF revolutionary women combatants show the engagement of women at all levels of military and political structures. Thus, the revolutionary women combatants have participated as military leaders or simple combatants or served in logistics roles. The narratives of the TPLF women revolutionaries also indicate that the first of the two generations of women combatants, including Tesfa, was highly educated and left the urban struggle to join TPLF's cause, and hence such women were described as role models by the following generation, the majority of whom were less educated and came from rural Ethiopia. Nonetheless, for both age groups the revolutionary context was conducive to the politicization process. TPLF's strategic choice to open membership to women in 1976/1977 has effectively contributed to allying women to its cause. Hence, the revolutionary political context and history of resistance provided Tigrayan women with a strong attitudinal affinity with TPLF's cause, pulling them into the movement. The strategy to include women in the armed struggle opened the structure up to women. Finally, the age factor, according to Kampwirth (2002), or "biographical availability", according to McAdam (1986), allowed women to join the armed struggle and engage as combatants.

In general, what McAdam defined as biological availability was apparent among the majority of interviewees and played a significant role in the recruitment process of the different revolutionary movements. The revolutionaries were in most cases university students, young graduates or some high school students, who armed with a leftist ideology which they adopted within the student movement, were determined to transform the society. Consequently, most often they did not have constraints based on family or employment responsibilities. They were committed to the point that they affirmed that they were ready to die for their cause. Their narrative shows that the threat of death, torture or imprisonment was real for them.

They were conscious of this risk in their daily activities, as Lemlem argues "you have to understand that everything was real for us and we were ready to die for our cause. Whenever we left our houses, we were convinced that we might not come back". Thus there is no doubt that revolutionaries were involved in high-risk/cost activism.

Nonetheless, one also uncovers some nuances and sometimes contradictions when looking at what occurs on an individual level, especially when the focus is on the personal experiences of some of the interviewees. For a few of them, marital status, family or employment responsibilities presented some kind of constraints to their engagement in high-risk activism. One can speculate even more so in a patriarchal society, where women's role as the caregiver of the family is highlighted or even often celebrated.

Among the revolutionary women only two were married at the time, one of them had a young child and was pregnant at the time of her arrest. However, in both cases, neither their marital status nor their family responsibilities were seen or exposed as constraints in their political participation in general or underground armed struggle within the EPRP or Meison. For example, Emebet, who was highly involved within the leadership of ESUE's women's wing, returned back to Ethiopia to introduce her young daughter to her grandparents and family. Moreover, as the wife of one the founders of the EPRP, she was conscious of the risks she was taking and could have stayed abroad but she chose not only to return to Ethiopia but also to participate actively in the revolutionary struggle. In her case we can say that family responsibility, or having a young child did not prevent her to continue her engagement in the struggle. One supposition of why she chose to continue on the high-risk activism could originate from the radical habitus embedded in her personal history or biography. As Crossley (2003: 51) argues "radial habitus is closely bound up with an individual's biography but their biography is, in turn, intertwined with and affected by their social-structural location, as well as broader historical trends and events". It seems that for Emebet who was a highly politicized activist with a sense of history, all the elements were reunited for her to participate in this high-risk/ cost activism rather than to be confined into the traditional caregiving role.

For another one of the revolutionary activists, Tesfa, who had a child before the hectic days of the red terror, she tells us how her pregnancy contributed to her discharge from the *Zemecha* but did not stop her from participating in Kebele activities. On the other hand, while being a mother, did not certainly prevent the Derg to put her to prison and torture her, it gave her time to reflect on the consequences of an engagement in revolutionary activities. Here is what she says when later the Derg recruited her as revolutionary cadre, "I was not ready to sacrifice my life; I had my baby to look after. No way. There is this saying, "*lige kewlede hamotu fessesse*" [once you give birth to a child, you become cautious] – it is true". What does this tell us? Does this mean that her choice to go ahead with the Derg's recruitment was made out of fear of the Derg, a mother's sacrifice to protect her daughter? In other words, can this be an illustration of how women choose pragmatism, thus negotiate or manoeuvre between high levels of risk at the personal level and high levels of risk at the political/structural level? Tesfa's narrative surrounding her role as a Derg cadre was constructed on some ambiguity. She never said for example that she was pro-Derg, before her recruitment. But she described her attraction by refereeing to some of pro-Derg's women cadres such as Tiruwork Wakeyo and Yeshewalem Mengistu and showing the contradiction of opposition parties' actions/strategy against the Derg. At the time she was living with the father of her child, but she clearly stated that the decision to accept the recruitment was hers, as she did not tell her partner. It seems she did not want to be persuaded one way or the other, she consciously chose to accept Derg's proposition because it was also coherent with her convictions. The suggestion is that yes, family responsibilities or having a child is taken as one significant consideration in her decision because refusing then could have been assimilated with resistance, which entailed high-risk on personal level but low risk at the political/structural level. In this case, though the decision was also in line with her convictions.

Finally, family responsibility as a constraint in women's decision to engage in high-risk activism could be seen in the life stories of some of the older generation of the negotiators. Almaz, Gidey, and Tirunesh are among the

negotiators who belonged to the same age group as the revolutionary women but were not active members in any of the parties opposing the Derg. Therefore, they could be classified as non-participants, who mentioned family responsibilities as one of the reasons that made them avoid direct participation. At the time, Gidey was the mother of a one-year-old child and the spouse of a revolutionary imprisoned in the "*Arategna kifle Tore*" jail. Thus, as the sole provider of her family, instead of becoming activist, she chose to return back to the university and graduate with distinction. Here is how she remembers the time

> Sometimes, I skip class to go to the place where my husband was in prison, the "*Arategna kifle Tore*". I was just like a crazy person; I just circled the compound, go round and round. Was someone killed today? Was somebody taken from the prison? It was really difficult, and I had a one-year child… This was a black spot in my life, I always said, God how did you save me from this time? As a Tigrayan, all my friends went to the bushes; some have died, some went to prison or abroad. How did you save me? Maybe for this work I think".

Gidey could have joined one of the opposition parties; she was in the same age group, had social ties with other revolutionaries (her husband, her friends) but did not make the following step into high- risk activism because she was the provider of her family and mother to a young child. Thus Gidey's non-engagement was closely linked to her marital status and motherhood. Similarly, Almaze' s and Tiruwork' focus on their career and employment rather than political engagement was motivated by family responsibilities as they both had to play the adult role and support parents and/or siblings. Hence, while biological availability and social ties contributed to pull the majority of the revolutionary interviewees into high-risk activism, family responsibility, particularly women's caregiving role which is rooted in habitus, constrained some of the potentially biologically available young women to engage in high-risk/ cost activism.

Consequently, my argument is that no doubt McAdam's general theory of high-risk/cost activism offers a framework to study Ethiopian women's activism but a detailed analysis of the narratives unveils the existence of some nuances that are visible in the young women activists' positioning and

decision to participate or not in high-risk activism. The following question could therefore be what made the revolutionaries different form the non-participants? How did women from a presumably patriarchal society and different background in terms of class and/or ethnicity participate in this high/risk-cost activism?

One of the assumptions of this thesis is that Ethiopian women have a long history of resistance, in the social, political and military arena. This is made visible through the complex positioning of women in Ethiopia, who were historically able to participate in the country' s political life. The suggestion therefore is their engagement is rooted in radical habitus, which is itself a result of "habit and reflexivity" (Crossley 2003).

One of the arguments developed in this research is that Ethiopian women's activism is in the first place informed by local knowledge inherited and reproduced through habitus. This local knowledge, often referred to as wisdom, draws on women's capacity to appeal to local know-how leaned, practiced and transmitted from one generation to the next. In this way women learn to read, understand and participate in the construction of the society in which they live. Moreover, in the process they also learn to resist and/or negotiate with or bypass patriarchal norms. In other words, women have developed, among other forms of practices, the option of radical action, which is also transmitted, reproduced and produced continuously from one generation to another. This process is referred to as radical habitus.

The pioneers showed it with their participation in the struggle against the fascist Italian occupation. In fact, the pioneers are themselves successors to the previous generation of women who participated in defending the integrity of their country from previous Italian tentative of colonization (Pankhurst, S. 1957; Minale, 2001). The pioneers were able to draw on Ethiopian women's military history to join and participate in diverse forms of resistance movements available at the time. Hence, the pioneers' participation itself can be read as rooted in radical habitus. The story of Senedu Gabru who joined the Black Lion armed resistance movement during the war against the Italian occupation is an example of Ethiopian women's 'disposition' to radical action.

In other words Senedu Gabru was not an exception in joining the resistance or armed struggle. Other women from different backgrounds resisted and fought against the different Italian invasions and occupation at different levels as well as in previous internal wars. This military history is therefore informed by radical habitus, which was produced, reproduced and transmitted from one generation to the next. The pioneers' engagement in charity/welfare organizations is also inscribed in the radical habitus, which allowed them to appeal to previously acquired practices, techniques and skills and build on new ones to bring about social justice.

The revolutionaries' narratives are a testimony of this trend. Kalkidan's story about how w/ro Shewareged's (another pioneer figure of women in the Ethiopian resistance) heroic journey in the resistance is an illustration of how actions sometimes recorded in oral history are told, retold and transmitted. This is made visible in Kalkidan's mother's contribution both in the act of resistance and the act of transmission, which itself had an influence on Kalkidan's path to activism. However, while the pioneers' activism was built on continuities shaped by past histories of resistance and struggle, the revolutionaries' activism was constructed on the promise of change and/or transformation through the rejection and breakup of the old system. To this end they favoured looking at new forms of collective action informed by Marxist Leninist ideologies. Right from the beginning activists like Martha[65] took the lead and advocated women's participation in the revolutionary project, urging Ethiopian and Eritrean women to follow in the footsteps of other international revolutionary women's engagement for social change, and proclaiming solidarity. Inspired by Martha's manifesto, revolutionaries belonging to different opposing parties did not acknowledge or refer to their predecessor's history of resistance. To this day it remains a common belief that Ethiopian women's participation in collective action/struggle only started in the 1960s. The implication is that TPLF and other armed political organizations' success in mobilizing women in great numbers to join in the armed struggle was not only due to the organizations' strategy to open up and/or recruit women, but also due to the effect of the radical habitus which

[65] Martha's story will be examined below with the analysis of her manifesto.

fostered their disposition to engage in high/risk- high cost activism when necessary.

The negotiators' engagement can be read as a continuity of this process. On an individual level, when both revolutionaries and negotiators refer to their mothers' strength and wisdom, they reinforce the idea of a transmitted character and/or know-how expressed in women's everyday lived experience. When Dinknesh's mother decided to send her daughter to school behind the father's back, it was a form of resistance, especially as she came from a community that places women at the bottom of society. Dinknesh calls her mother and rural women like her mother in general the "unsung heroes". Here is how she expresses her acknowledgement,

> "the rural women carry Africa in their stomach, on their shoulders and on their head. People like my mum have done so much. We survived because of her. I am here today because of her. But nobody knows her, there are so many like my mum, who were born and have died without being acknowledged. Their death does not mean anything; they have died without knowing that they have lived. They are the ones who produced us, especially people like us who came from rural Ethiopia.

When mothers, aunts, neighbours or friends help a young girl escape early marriage, or help in organizing her escape from abduction, it is a form of resistance anchored on radical habitus. Just as HTPs exist in patriarchal societies like Ethiopia, different schemes of practices or techniques of resistance like these have been developed and continue to be deployed to assist or enable young women escape from these types of practices.

The narratives also show that the appeal to women's organizational skills by the church, the state and rebel organizations of the different periods, is both an acknowledgment and confirmation of this disposition which is rooted in radical habitus. Today, both the pioneers' and the revolutionaries' activism is recognized and celebrated by their successors. One of Emebet's first actions as the first gender advisor to the PM's office was to organize the first *Bazar* (fair) of the current period to acknowledge the pioneers, their engagement and contribution to the improvement of women's lives. The negotiators' recent campaigns about celebrating the past and current activists' contributions, is set to continue and perpetuate this trend. Some of the

interviewees saw their participation in this study as being in line with the project of recognizing and documenting women's activism, which could be translated as a new form, or another dimension, of radical habitus.

In the following section I consider the role of radical habitus as an abeyance structure that maintains continuities of women's activism during times of (apparent) stability or peace.

Movement in abeyance: maintaining continuities in activism

Taylor's (1989) study, based on feminist movements from 1945 to 1960, examines how some small feminist structures functioned as abeyance structures. Similar to Crossley (2003), she challenges the traditional account that describes social movements as cyclical events that emerge with a birth of new networks and then die out, only to become re-established with new sets of networks as another cycle breaks out. Her study of feminist movements during the post-war years before the resurgence of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s places "resurgent challenges with roots in earlier cycles of feminist activism that presumably ended when suffrage was won" (Taylor 1989:761). Hence, taking the example of small organized feminist structures such as the New Women's Party (NWP), Taylor demonstrates how these abeyance structures functioned as the linkage that maintained continuities between one upsurge in activism and another. The argument is that during the breaks between crises or upsurges in activism, these social movement abeyance structures allowed feminists' activities to be carried out within an inhospitable political environment.

Moreover, as seen in the literature review, Taylor and Rupp (1993: 33), looking at the critics of cultural feminism, who denounce its role in the depoliticization and/or demobilization of the women's movement, argue that implicit in the critic of cultural feminism is "the centrality of lesbianism to the process of de-politicization". They propose turning their gaze towards the communities that contributed to the creation of "women's culture" (p. 34). They claim that lesbian feminist culture not only contributed to women's activism during the heyday of the women's movement but also held the movement in abeyance during periods of waning activity. Hence, both

studies expose the functions of abeyance movements in maintaining continuity in activism by providing “part of a group's repertoire of collective action …[to] influence the subsequent range of actions available to future challenges” (Taylor 1989: 771).

Nonetheless, Taylor (1989: 761) specifies that her “approach relies heavily on the central premises of resource mobilization theory: political opportunities and an indigenous organizational base are major factors in the rise and decline of movements”. Conversely, some scholars have explored the problem of agency in political action. Crossley (2003), Lovell (2003) and McNay (2004 2010) have turned to Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus”, or more specifically “radical habitus”, to explain agents’ reflexive disposition or consciousness of their ability to act and bring about social change. It is interesting to see how these concepts come into play or not in understanding Ethiopian women’s engagement with political action. Therefore, I argue that while some revolutionaries have found abeyance structures to maintain continuity, as in Taylor’s description of the term, others, both from the revolutionary and negotiator groups, have appealed to their radical habitus, which functions as an abeyance structure that structures the way they think and act, thereby allowing them to maintain continuity in their activism during political contexts unreceptive to activism. Below are a few examples of how movement abeyance structures and radical habitus as an abeyance structure come into play with regard to Ethiopian women’s activism.

One place where women activists, particularly the revolutionaries, kept their activism alive is prison. During the military regime, the different groups of activists continued their struggle in different forms. While some of the Red Terror survivors either fled the country or joined the different guerrilla groups opposed to the Derg, others found themselves in prison, particularly the Kerchele prison. Narratives of revolutionaries who had had more than two years of prison time show that, once in prison, they did not change the way they acted. In fact, two of our interviewees, Admas and Emebet, who were in Kerchele for four and a half and eleven years respectively, continued their activism in different forms. Although they found prison life both emotionally and intellectually challenging, these revolutionary women placed their

organizing and intellectual skills at the service of the other inmates. They established schools, in which inmates shared what they knew. Here is how Admas narrates their actions:

> While in prison we established a school up to high school. I worked as a school director, a teacher, or just filled in where there was a need. It did not matter whether I was familiar with the subject or not. I would read all night if necessary and share what I had. It was all about sharing. This way, you also educate yourself. I learned accounting, law; it was a struggle by itself. Why did I do this, because I had to? The majority of the inmates did not know how to read and write and a few of them had some elementary education. I was so active that at some point I was again designated as an EPRP agitator and, with a couple of others, was taken to what was called the third police station headquarters to be interrogated. We were sent back to Kerchele, with the support of the director of our prison, who pleaded our case, stating our engagement in the different committees, such as the education or hygiene committees.

The narrative of both the revolutionaries illustrates how prison not only functioned as an abeyance structure in which they maintained their activists' practices, it allowed them to improve and develop new sets of organizational skills for future reference.

> Actually, my Harvard is prison, and sometimes when I say I am a Harvard graduate, people say "Oh! I didn't know you went to Harvard!" [laughter]. The biggest school for me is prison, that's where I learned to live with people. And I am always grateful; I would not have learned what I learned in any college. All I know about how to manage people, I learned the A, B, C of management in prison. So my motto became that if I could manage prison life the way I did, there is nothing I could not do. For me, there is no such difficult person. It's how you deal with that person.

In prison, the revolutionaries were able to organize in committees, providing them with a structure in which they maintained various activities to improve the living conditions of prison life and also enhance their own and women inmates' educational background. In this sense, can we not argue that prison, with its different committees, offered the abeyance structure necessary to maintain the continuity of the women's movement?

Similarly, the narratives of the revolutionaries, survivors of the hectic days of the Red Terror, and the older negotiators indicate that they kept Ethiopian women's activism alive just by becoming the professional/working women

they were trained to be. Once EPRP and Meison were defeated, the Derg consolidated its power in the country; after a few years of imprisonment, some of the revolutionary women were released. While some left the country, those who remained, such as Lemlem, Admas and Fawsia, joined the workforce – in their cases, the ministries in their respective fields. Their narratives of the years following the end of the Red Terror period and prison reveal that, although they were allowed to work and earn their livelihood, their employment trajectory was filled with both periods of stagnation and rare promotions. They declared having experienced being ignored and isolated and/or treated with indifference. Nevertheless, they were able to gain experience in the different ministries in which they were employed.

Some women activists joined the Derg's structures and eventually contributed to women's organizing within REWA. Two of the interviewees were recruited to integrate the Derg's structures. As seen in chapter six, Sehin, the first woman recruited by the Derg, remained within the system until 1986 and eventually left without a problem. The second is Fawsia. Fawsia's path to activism was shaped by her involvement with the YMCA, rather than with the student movement, as is the case of many of her peers. Her role as the chair of female members of YMCA and her actions in the relief efforts for the 1973/1974 Wollo famine contributed to her visibility to the media and the public. The Derg recruited her and sent her to Russia for political education. Her cadre career was short-lived, as her husband, a member of the navy whom she had met during political training in Russia, ended up in prison a couple of years after their return to Ethiopia. Fawsia, a young mother of two children who suddenly became the wife of a counter-revolutionary, found herself ostracized. Her narrative reveals that she herself was actively participating in raising women's awareness. She had joined the association for the wives of members of the military and had become an active member of the association: "While our main purpose was focused on doing humanitarian activities, we were also doing activities to support our husbands, and to raise awareness". She was a leading force in her association**,** promoting the idea of giving military training to military wives so that they could defend themselves and their children in the absence of their

husbands. However, after her husband's arrest, she become persona non grata and had to struggle to put food on the table and find work and keep it. In order to do so she had to continue her education by attending night classes at Addis Ababa University, gradually progressing in her career as arbitration judge at the labour department. "Then I was transferred to another department where I had the title of an expert with no real work". Although Fawsia's narrative of her experience seems to illustrate her resilient character rather than a form of activism, the way she thinks and acts is informed by the radical habitus that structures her actions. In other words, Fawsia, confronted by an inhospitable work environment (due to her status as the widow of a counter-revolutionary), was not content with a simple job that put food on the table. She applied for a position in the labour affairs department and became a labour litigation judge, which is consistent with the activist self that we find in her women's rights activist path of today.

Moreover, some of the negotiators, such as Almaze and Gidey, who were in high schools and universities at the same time as the revolutionaries and who had managed to avoid political involvement, continued in their individual professional careers. With regard to Almaze, her narrative indicates that prioritization of family obligations may explain her absence from the political scene. As seen in chapter seven, Almaze had to join Teferi Mekonnen, a comprehensive high school that offered both academic and secretarial/commercial options. She says "I could have joined the academic section but I did not, because coming from both a separated family and an underprivileged environment I needed to hurry out of the school system and join the workforce to be able to contribute to the family income". Hence, she continued on her personal path of advancing her career. However, her narrative shows how, when she was promoted to head of a big department of the institution she worked for, she made a conscious decision to pick out qualified women instead of men to work for her department. Almaze does not articulate this action as an engagement with women's rights, or activism. Rather, she explains it as an individual action that was based on personal observation, and as her attempt to correct women's absence from managerial positions. Hence, it appears that even when their action is

political, some women tend to minimize or even deny all its political characteristics.

In Gidey's case, it was her status as a mother and married woman that prevented her from active political participation. Below, Gidey, a social work graduate and partner of a former revolutionary man imprisoned during the Derg period, describes her personal and professional experience of that time:

> Still, it was the "dark time". You didn't relax, they knew all about you. You felt watched all the time. One day a security person told me, because there were situations like this at the time, that he knew everything about me, what breakfast I ate, what lunch I ate … they knew, inside and out they knew.
>
> During that time, you didn't apply for work. You were assigned. So I was assigned to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA). I worked for what was then called a rehabilitation agency. It's an agency under the MoLSA, which had a mandate to work for the disabled, particularly disabled elderly people, and orphan children …
>
> At that time we were advocating a policy for disabled people, though it was challenging because many were not happy to do that …
>
> This was the time when we were challenging society, saying that disabled people can work if you provide for them and allow them to acquire the skills…
>
> Finally, the environment was not good. So I applied for a job in an NGO for a project manager position. I worked for – you know Dr Jember? She was one of our role models, a pioneer in the NGO industry, you know her, don't you? She was in prison for four and a half years. She was such an inspirational, active working person in NGO business. It was like a big university for me I learned so much there [*bisu neger, tiliku university, tiliku university, bisu temarkugn*].

Although this extract is Gidey's personal and professional experience, it reflects the context and employment conditions available during that era. Despite the end of the Red Terror, the fear of and the control of the Derg remained. She describes an inhospitable political environment, in which it was difficult and risky to establish an organized structure for activism. However, despite the difficulties, Gidey continued to work hard and advance her career, managing even to find a cause to defend (that of the right of people with disabilities to access education and employment). Gidey

eventually joined Dr Jember Teferra's[66] NGO, the Integrated Holistic Approach – Urban Development project (usually known as IHA-UDP) where she worked for a few years as an activist working for the alleviation of poverty in slum areas. Accordingly, Gidey would subsequently reposition herself and follow in Dr Jember's footsteps with the foundation of an NGO, of which she is still the executive director today. In this way, she adapted her activism to the system in place. Hence, in this time of apparent stability, in which the Derg's controlling mechanisms were in place, women like Gidey and Tirunesh found abeyance structures in the few NGOs allowed to work at the time. On the other hand, others, such as Almaze, Yemesserach, Lemlem, Admas and Tserah, silently learned to live and work, developing their experience and building on certain available organizational techniques for future reference.

Subsequently, they would draw on these skills and techniques when the political context changed and opportunities were created, during both the last years of the Derg and the period of the transitional government and also the early days of the current administration. After 1991, women took up the momentum of change; they organized in small structures, such as EWLA, NEWA and Women In Self-Help Employment (WISE), all established to improve the social, economic and political conditions of women. Of the 19 interviewees, only two TPLF ex-combatants are not connected to a women's organization. One is still engaged in the military while the other is a political activist. All the remaining interviewees have strong links to women's

[66] Dr Jember Teferra is the founder of the Integrated Holistic Approach – Urban Development project established in 1989. She was first mentioned in chapter five, in Gidey's introductory extract. She is an activist who opted for a community-based, holistic, integrated approach based on the needs of the poor in slum areas. She is the perfect example of how Ethiopian women activists adapt their activism to the political context. Dr Jember has experienced the three historical periods: she started her activist journey during the imperial period, participating in various organizations (such as the Nursing Council, Cheshire Homes for physically handicapped people, Meskaye Hizunan Medhane Alem church school and the Orthodox Church Council Development Commission). Between 1976 and 1981, the Derg imprisoned her in Kerchele, where she met revolutionaries like Emebet and Admas. In prison, she continued her activism by obtaining permission to train 87 health assistants, from both the inmates and the prison guard population, who were dispatched to various prisons around the country. Moreover, in prison, there was no healthcare system to rely on. This created the opportunity to open a clinic and be somewhat actively involved in helping the inmate community (source interview/articles EMWA).

organizations; they either work for or serve as gender consultants within the NGO sector.

The suggestion is, no doubt, that Ethiopian women's activism is at its highest levels during periods of crisis; however, it is also present during normal times, only it manifests in different forms. Thus, abeyance structures, in the form of either small organized structures (participating in the different committees while in prison or working for the few NGOs) or individuals' radical habitus, that function as the "structured and structuring structure" (Creswell 2003: 51) provide continuity during times of peace. Hence, both in prison and at work, the activists are confronted with an inhospitable political environment, yet in each of these situations they manage to use their organizational and interpersonal skills to negotiate a way to act within the system, maintaining continuity in activism.

Negotiators' low-risk but high-cost activism

Other political conditions call for other strategies. The last three chapters have explored in what type of activism the pioneers, revolutionaries and negotiators were engaged. The pioneers and the negotiators were mostly involved in women's associations. Their activism was based on bringing about social justice through different mechanisms. On the one hand, the pioneers opted to organize in charity- or welfare-based associations, mainly to improve the socio-economic conditions of women and children in general. They also promoted the role of women in society at the local, national and international levels. Locally, this was translated into organizing charity events to fund projects and activities in the various parts of the country (Women's Affairs Office at the Prime Minister's Office 2007). On the national and international level, they organized and/or participated in various conferences pertaining to women and their role in the development process. Hence, they were committed to gradual change without calling for structural change and thus without challenging the status quo.

The negotiators are women activists who joined the movement in the early 1990s and can to a certain extent be identified as the pioneers' successors. First, as opposed to the revolutionaries, and similar to the pioneers, their

activism can be classified to a certain extent as relatively safe. In fact, while pioneers' activism is consistent with McAdam's (1986) description of low-risk/cost activism, the negotiators' activism falls into what could be termed as low-risk but high-cost activism. As Lemlem, one of the former revolutionaries, who works in the NGO sector today, confirms, "the main difference between the activism then and the activism of the current period is that today you can do it legally. You just have to register and put your certificate on the wall, and you can go about your business within a legal framework". The implication is that, because engagement in women's rights activism is legal, it is thus in general relatively safe in comparison with the revolutionaries' type of activism. On the other hand, negotiators' commitment to the cause they are defending is costly in terms of time, energy and resources.

Otherwise, the negotiators follow in the pioneers' footsteps and continue the agenda of social justice in general and the emancipation of women in particular, within civil society organizations and NGOs. Again they use different mechanisms to advance their agenda. Thus, right from the beginning of the present historical period, negotiators have organized in small structures in the form of local/Ethiopian NGOs to work towards social justice in general and to promote the different rights of women in particular. Only the revolutionaries have clearly participated in collective action to bring about social transformation; as Kampwirth (2004, Loc: 178) argues in her comparative study of Latin American revolutionary activists, "gender justice was almost never a factor in their initial decision to join". Similarly, the narratives of the revolutionaries, which are consistent with this statement, show that it was through their reading of the egalitarian ideology covered in the Marxist–Leninist literature and through their respective revolutionary movements that they eventually started looking at the issue of women. Their narratives also indicate that although the issue of women was raised, priority was given to the main goal of social transformation. Nevertheless, their personal experience of sexism, particularly within higher education institutions and later in their political parties, made them wary of the different forms of gender inequality. It appears that while the revolutionaries clearly prioritized the agenda of structural change in the early stage of their activism,

the issue of gender equality embedded in leftist ideologies crept in and accelerated the raising of their feminist consciousness.

To sum up, in the case of the pioneers and negotiators, their activism is constantly linked to feminist values as their activism located within women's organizations coexisted in a parallel structure. That seems to suggest that whatever the type of activism, or the period, feminism is embedded in their activism. Accordingly, in the following section, I shall demonstrate how the pioneers', revolutionaries' and negotiators' activisms draw on feminist principles and examine whether and how they align with pre-existing typologies of feminism.

II. Tracing feminism: what type of feminism?

Pioneers' feminist positioning

In 1949, Simon De Beauvoir published her ground-breaking feminist work *Le deuxième sexe,* translated and published in English in 1952 under the title *The second sex*. In 1963, Betty Friedan wrote *The feminine mystique,* which marked the beginning of the second wave of feminism and explored "the problem that has no name". Around the same period, more specifically in the late 1950s, educated Ethiopian women were also writing articles on issues related to women with a clear feminist vision. They were excited about the fact that the Revised Constitution of 1955 provided women with full citizenship and looked ahead to what needed to be done for its implementation. Therefore, when women around the world started to raise feminist issues and publish these books, the Ethiopian pioneers were also at the forefront of writing about the emancipation of the Ethiopian woman (Pankhurst 1957). For example, in a single issue of the *Ethiopia Observer*, pioneers like Senedu Gebru, Mary Tadesse and Naomi Gebrat addressed issues related to "Girl's education" and "The rights of women" as well as reporting that the "University College of Addis Ababa debates emancipation", respectively (Senedu, Mary, Naomi, 1957).

> In other countries women have had to fight to gain entrance to universities and the professions. This will never happen in Ethiopia. Women, like men, are entitled to voting rights under the new constitution granted by His Imperial Majesty. (Senedu Gebru 1957)

Therefore, the pioneers had no reason to believe that the future for Ethiopian women would be anything other than bright and promising. However, when it came to the application of the agenda of women's equality in practice, several structural, institutional and societal obstacles arose. Although efforts were made with regard to women's education, only selected women who completed their higher education had access to leadership positions. The majority of women with high school or college diplomas joined newly opened sectors such as nursing, teaching and secretarial positions, which were generally allocated to women in conformity with western patriarchy. Moreover, while there was an attempt to address the equality of women with men in the public sphere, there was no questioning or raising of the equality of women in the family or the private sphere, either by the regime or the pioneers. On the contrary, simultaneously we see that a new form of gender roles, based on domesticity, the modern face of patriarchy, crept in with the development of handicraft schools specifically designed "to assist the Ethiopian woman at home to adapt herself to modern conditions and promote the welfare of her family" (Pankhurst, S. 1957: 80).

In relation to the feminist positioning of the pioneers, while they recognized the need for change, they didn't insist on drastic or radical change. Hence, their strategy consisted of negotiated efforts to achieve equality in the different arenas of the public sphere. Thus, their aim was to achieve equal access to education and employment, as well as equal opportunity in all domains of public life. Once all these conditions were achieved, they assumed, success could then be achieved through individual effort, hence they seemed to believe that what was true for them was necessarily true for all women. "The Ethiopian girl seems quite resolute in sharing the work, responsibilities and privileges enjoyed by men", writes Senedu (1957: 76), who in this regard seemed to share liberal feminist ideals.

Consequently, we can argue that the pioneers assumed work in the public domain to be a liberating factor in women's lives. In a country where the majority of the population was and still is from rural areas, and women had an estimated workday of 12 to 16 hours (Habtamu et al 2004), it was unrealistic to assume that joining the public sphere would necessarily bring

equality. In fact, the pioneers seemed to be addressing the problems of women in urban areas and/or those with similar backgrounds to them, which implies that perhaps the pioneers were only talking about elite women. Or could it be that, for generations, elite Ethiopian women considered themselves as more or less equal with the men of privileged background rather than with most of the Ethiopian peasant men? In this case, they appear to be class biased in their assumptions.

Nevertheless, they were also aware of their privileged positioning as they simultaneously worked towards the improvement of the condition of less privileged women by organizing in what were then called non-profit-making charitable corporations, such as EWWA.

The following testimony sheds light on their frame of mind and whether they could express a feminist consciousness or not. The extract is taken from my interview with Emebet, one of the revolutionary activists, who had the opportunity to have a conversation with W/ro Ketsela, a pioneer, a few years ago. Their conversation focused on the objectives of the charitable organization W/ro Ketsela supported, the *Golmassa Setoch Mahber* (approximate translation: the Association for Young Girls).

> W/ro Ketsela to Emebet: The association was created for those who, for some reason, did not go to school, and/or due to the war, have lost their homes, and were forced into practices they did not choose, or would not have got into had their situation not changed. We founded this association so they could be rehabilitated. At that time we knew what they did for a living, but unlike you now, we could not use the words, or could not dare to name what they do, that's why we called it this.
>
> Emebet to me: You see, the difference now is, we are blunt, we say the word "*setengnadary*" (prostitute) bluntly, but they did not, they had to cover it up a bit.

This extract, which exposes why W/ro Ketsela and her peers founded this association, describes the way that the society in which the pioneers live, and how they in return, think and act. Clearly, the pioneers opened this association to provide women prostitutes, whom they assumed were "forced" into this profession, with shelter, training and ultimately another future. Their motivation was to do "good", Emebet assumes: "it was a charity, welfare

association". Nevertheless, this extract has also the merit of uncovering how the society they live in and their positioning in that society shaped their thoughts and actions. Hence, they were encouraged or limited by what society or culture allowed them to do. As Bourdieu (1989: 18) noted, "no doubt agents have an active apprehension of the world, no doubt agents do construct their vision of their world. But this is carried out under structural constraints". Thus, when W/ro Ketsela admits they had to play with words by giving a more "proper" name to their association, she illustrates how the pioneers were able to negotiate by appealing to their knowledge of the cultural norms that constrained them and operate by finding a scheme that allowed them to act and intervene in the rehabilitation of women/girls who practised prostitution. Hence, this extract reveals the wisdom that pioneers had inherited and reproduced to negotiate and contour cultural norms afflicted by a patriarchal society.

Similarly, the assumption the pioneers were class biased seems too simplistic as their perceptions and thoughts were structured by their social positioning. The pioneers' activism, whether we identify it as charity or welfare-based, was designed to improve the conditions of the poor in general and destitute women and children in particular. In fact, many of the revolutionaries' narratives on their predecessors, whether they were from a Christian or Muslim background, indicate that they learned the notion of helping the less fortunate from their families, most often while accompanying them to religious ceremonies. The suggestion is that helping the poor is entrenched in Ethiopian culture; hence, the pioneers were predisposed to continue in that tradition. However, they adapted a new model they imported from the western world. In other words, they have consciously chosen to organize and act within charitable organizations, which implies that in the process they were able to develop the habitus embedded in them. The next question could be, then, to what extent their engagement in social justice is based on a feminist consciousness.

In fact, the question of being feminist or not was not an issue at the time. Some of the pioneers may not necessarily have been aware of feminism or feminist struggles abroad. In other words, as Emebet argued, their

organization was based on charity. On the other hand, some, as seen above, were enlightened and articulated more liberal feminist principles. Senedu (1957: 77) clarifies their positioning when she argues that “the possibilities of economic and constitutional rights and the education to enjoy them all indicate a rich future for the Ethiopian woman”. She seems to suggest that once institutional and legal barriers were removed, the rest of the struggle relied on the individual effort of the Ethiopian woman. This is confirmed by the following extract from the editorial dedicated to the Ethiopian woman:

> What will Ethiopian women be able to achieve through the higher education now accorded to them? Will they be able to enter parliament to take high government office, to preside over ministries? Will they be able to rise in profession, to become directors of hospitals and technical advisors to government departments in various fields, or to serve as ambassadors abroad? (p. 74)

Evidently, these questions suggest an awareness of the cause of women, or a feminist consciousness, that shaped the way the pioneers thought or acted. More specifically, the pioneers draw on liberal feminist values which emphasize women’s equal access to education and employment. The following testimony illustrates the level of commitment that pioneers like Senedu Gebru have to girls’ education. It is an extract taken from a video made to honour and recognize W/ro Senedu’s contribution to Ethiopian society. The speaker is none other than Dr Jember, whom we have encountered when discussing women’s movement in abeyance.

> Outside Etege Menen’s [a girls’ school’s] fences there was a sign that says “young girls, like your fellow brothers you have the responsibility to help build your country. Please come in and get educated”; it was an invitation for young girls to come in and get an education. The guards were also instructed, if they saw girls outside the school gate curious about the sign, to let them into the school, and W/ro Senedu used to ask these girls why they were not at school and persuade them to enrol. If they had any problems they summoned their parents and gave these girls all assistance for them to stay in school. (Dr Jember Teferra, former student of Etege Menen)

Hence, during the period from 1965 to1974, while the pioneers seen above continued their struggle for equality of women with men in the public

sphere,[67] a new generation of women activists emerged within the student movement and demanded structural change, which they hoped would establish a more equal society. It seems that the student movement in particular has produced strong female students with radical viewpoints. Consequently, it can be argued, with regard to the role of women during the hectic period that led to the Revolution of 1974, that women's activism has witnessed both continuity and change.

The emergence of feminist revolutionaries

The student movement

The literature on the student movement asserts that although women actively participated in the collective actions that contributed to the fall of the monarchy, the issue of gender inequalities remained in the background (Alem 2008). Nevertheless, female student activists conscious of gender inequalities did indeed raise the issue of women during this period. In the following short extract, Kalkidan explores how she was confronted with the question of women's subordinate position in Ethiopian society and, by extension, in the student movement. At the time, she and a male peer were representing the Chicago chapter of the student movement at the congress that was taking place in Washington DC. During that meeting, she was asked a question by two female members attending the congress:

> "Coming from a culture that did not allow women in leadership positions, how come you became a leader of a chapter"? At that point, I did not understand where they wanted me to go with this question. In fact, they wanted me to affirm that women can become leaders, etc. … And since I did not understand the message they were sending I just responded, oh no, we don't have a problem like that in Chicago. They were very upset with me because I spoiled the opportunity to raise the issue of women's subordination in the Ethiopian context. Once outside, they explained their point to me, they told me, we don't have to go far, look at the people who have come to this congress – including us, there are only about four female members present here. We asked you this question so that you could develop this point of view. This again motivated me to study and do research on the conditions of Ethiopian women.

[67] At the Hanna Rydh Memorial Seminar II 29th September–4th October 1969, the speeches of two Ethiopian women confirmed the focus on the role that women's charitable organizations could play in the development process by advocating the participation of Ethiopian women in the economic, social and political life of the country.

The specific question addressed to Kalkidan illustrates not only the two students' awareness of the subordinate position of women in Ethiopia but also their objectives: they clearly wanted women's issues to be part of the global agenda of the student movement. Hence, it exposed their quest for a collective consciousness on the status or subordination of Ethiopian women. On an individual basis, her response is also quite revealing. On the one hand, it shows that the incident prompted her to focus and reflect on this issue since she immediately began to do research on it, which eventually led her to write a paper on Ethiopian women and labour. Here is what she said in relation to this consequence: "So from that point on I became an active member of the movement. I wrote extensively on Ethiopian women. We, a friend of mine and I, presented our research paper, on labour and women at a regional conference of the student movement".

On the other hand, it unveils the socialization process she went through, and hence it exposes the effects of her upbringing and education. In other words, we can argue that Kalkidan belongs to one of the post-war generations of Ethiopians who benefited from both the 1931 Constitution and the Revised Constitution of 1955 that guaranteed women's equality with men, as well as the development of modern education in some urban areas of Ethiopia. She is the perfect example of the "aspiring woman" (to use Naomi's (1957) expression mentioned in Chapter five, who had access both to education and employment, issues raised and promoted by the pioneers. Or we can argue that Kalkidan certainly benefited from a modern upbringing and education in gaining a leadership position in the movement, but most importantly she arrived at that position because in her mind there was no question that she was inferior to men. Here is how Rahel describes the frame of mind of women: "in Ethiopia, we women are free in our heads, putting aside the practical things, in our heads we are independent. Inside we are equals; when I say equal it doesn't mean we were competing with men – women who want to be equal to men have no ambition as far as I am concerned". It appears that Kalkidan thinks and acts the way Rahel describes. As such, her first reaction to the question, given her nervousness at her first intervention, was that, no, there was no problem in her chapter. In

fact, as a university student in the late 1960s, she was well aware of the different movements that were occurring in the United States, including the feminist movements. However, it is this question that triggered her interest in women's issues in general and Ethiopian women's in particular.

Similarly, Rahel and Emebet were going through comparable experiences on the other side of the Atlantic within the student movement in Europe. They both describe how they were gradually pulled into the student movement to become part of the leadership of the women's wing of ESUE, in which they both ended up doing research and writing extensively on women's issues for their journal *Teglachin*. Hence, in both cases, we can argue that participation in the student movement opened up space for them to explore the status of women in Ethiopia. Consequently the struggle was no longer only about class struggle; it became also about – not gender, but rather the exploration of "women's issues". In this way, to a certain extent, the structure – that is, the establishment of a women's wing within the student organizations – allowed all activists and more particularly female activists to explore feminist themes, which consequently accelerated their consciousness in relation to what Lemlem termed the "double or even triple/quadruple oppression" of women in Ethiopia.

Moreover, most often the revolutionary activists' narrative described the chauvinist character of their organization. The implication is reflected in the question addressed to Kalkidan. The issue of male chauvinism within the political parties that emerged after the Revolution, such as EPRP, and/or the various rebel armed forces, such as TPLF, also emerges from the revolutionary activists' narratives, confirming the accounts of the female members of the student movement, who highlighted the subordinate position they were expected to accept. The suggestion is that the experience of participating in the movement was also an eye-opener for them as they realized that the majority of their male peers expected them to take supporting roles as opposed to leadership positions. "When a female student occupied a leadership position within the structure of the organization or the party, because of her merit – that is, hard work – there were a lot of people who did not accept it," Lemlem states. The next question could be whether

female students were ready to take on leadership positions. Lemlem's response is clear: there were probably a lot of "Marthas" (see following paragraph) in the movement, including talented female students who wrote incredible poems: "I wonder where all their writings disappeared to?" Lemlem concludes.

Martha was an emblematic female figure of the student movement. She was among the six student activists who were killed during an attempt to hijack an Ethiopian Airline aeroplane on December 1972. Only Tadelech Kidane Mariam (who had close family ties with two of our interviewees, a revolutionary and a negotiator) survived the attack, although she was wounded. The imperial regime subsequently imprisoned her.

Below is Martha's manifesto,[68] a manifesto she wrote on the eve of her revolutionary action. At the time, Martha was a third-year medical student and a very active member of the student movement.

> We, the women of Ethiopia and Eritrea, have made our lives ready to participate in a struggle, and we would like to explain the nature of our struggle to our sisters and brothers all over the world. Our struggle demands a bitter sacrifice in order to liberate our oppressed and exploited people from the yokes of feudalism and imperialism. In this struggle we have to be bold and merciless. Our enemies can only understand such a language. We, the women of Ethiopia and Eritrea, are not only exploited as members of the working classes and peasants, we are also victims of gender inequality, treated as second-class citizens. Therefore, our participation in this struggle must double the efforts of other oppressed groups; we must fight harder, we must be at the forefront. We must equally participate in the struggle for economic and social justice that our brothers have waged. We have a responsibility to become a formidable force in the revolutionary army. The rights for freedom and equality are not manna from heaven. We, the women, have to be organized and have to make ourselves ready for any armed struggle. This fight will need financial, material and moral support from progressive international women's associations. We reach out to our sisters in other parts of the world so you can help us achieve this goal; we hope your support will reach us, as we need it. We affirm our full support for the oppressed people of the world who are struggling to free themselves from imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism and racism! We stand by the freedom fighters in Vietnam, Palestine, Guinea-Bissau, and in other African and Latin

[68] The manifesto was written in Amharic. This translated version of the manifesto was posted on 19th November 2011.

> American countries; we also champion the civil rights leaders in North America. Victory to the popular struggle of the people! May the people's movement for freedom in both Ethiopia and Eritrea live forever! My sisters and my brothers, let's keep on fighting!

In this manifesto, Martha clearly identifies whom she is representing, namely the women of Ethiopia and Eritrea (at a time when Eritrea was still part of Ethiopia). In so doing, she recognizes the separate entity of Eritrea and by extension those who were struggling for the freedom of their country. Although she identifies the main enemy of the oppressed people of Ethiopia as feudalism and imperialism, she also acknowledges the subordinate position of women, thereby recognizing not only class oppression but also gender inequality as the challenges facing Ethiopian women. This manifesto was not only about the necessity for Ethiopian women to struggle for freedom and equality, but was also an appeal for solidarity with other like-minded women's associations all over the world. Martha mentions several struggles occurring in other countries, such as Vietnam, Palestine, Guinea-Bissau, etc., exposing the global nature of the agenda and her awareness of and solidarity with the struggles going on in different parts of the planet. In so doing, she also exposes how her world view, which coincides with that of the other movements mentioned above, shaped her thinking and course of action. For her, Ethiopian and Eritrean women should follow the examples of the above-mentioned armed struggles to achieve the economic and social justice they have been denied.

Hence, Martha's manifesto, like other manifestos of that specific time (late 1960s and early 1970s), is based on a leftist ideology. It was also the time of national liberation struggles in Africa and revolutionary struggles in Latin America, which either tried to get rid of colonial powers or overthrow dictatorships, such as the Samosa family dynasty in Nicaragua or the "impersonal, abstract and collective" military rule in El Salvador (Kampwirth 2002: 46). Coincidently, these two countries have seen the emergence of revolutionary guerrilla movements, and a significant number of women guerrilla activists have joined them and participated in the armed struggle. Therefore, when Martha appeals for solidarity, she is referring to those women fighters who were willing to go through the process of radical action

in order to achieve their goals. Her aim was to show that there were precedents and that Ethiopian and Eritrean women were not alone in wanting to fight for freedom and equality. Thus, like her Ethiopian male counterparts, Martha is inspired by leftist ideology and the experiences of women guerrilla activists in different parts of the world. Although Martha's thoughts and actions were shaped by the time, in which leftist ideology and revolutionary movements dominated, she could also have appealed to the experience of many Ethiopian women fighters of previous generations. The suggestion is that although it is understandable for the women revolutionary activists to refer to leftist ideology and collective action, since, as Lemlem argues, "not participating then was like swimming against the tide", they tend to forget the heroic actions and experiences of many Ethiopian women in resistance movements of previous generations. In fact, for the revolutionaries, the pioneers, some of whom actively participated in the resistance movement against the Italian invasion, were more or less seen as part of the oppressive feudal regime. Hence, the pioneers, resistant or not, were rejected without any consideration of their contribution to the improvement of Ethiopian women's lives.

Meanwhile, in Ethiopia, Lemlem and her peers were also reading and raising their own consciousness on the double oppression of women. As the student movement that started in the 1960s evolved into its radicalization period during the mid-/late 1960s and early 1970s, the question that came to the forefront was the abolition of the "feudal" system with the intention of instituting a more just society symbolized by the request to allocate "land to the tiller*".* The movement not only questioned the class bias and denounced the overall social injustice of the system, but also contributed to its demise with the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, consequently leading to the setting up of a state guided by socialist ideology.

To sum up, in relation to the question of women's equality, the revolutionary women of this in-between period[69] privileged the Marxist analysis, which identified class as the main problem of society. This analysis relegates

[69] 1965–1974, the transitional period before the 1974 Revolution, in which the radicalization process of the student movement occurred.

gender hierarchy to a secondary issue that could be solved once women joined forces with men to dismantle feudalist Ethiopia and build socialist Ethiopia. Despite this fact, it can be argued that continuity or, even more, an acceleration of the feminist consciousness-raising process occurred within their revolutionary location, as the revolutionaries were pushed into the task of organizing women for their respective bigger organizations.

Many scholars have noted that the issue of women was officially put on the national agenda, not during the imperial regime, but rather during the Derg regime, which decreed that the "woman question" be raised, based on the socialist ideology as prescribed in and followed by Russia and the Eastern Bloc. Nevertheless, what do the narratives of the revolutionary women activists who had participated in the various opposing parties tell us? What did their experience in revolutionary movements show? The following section explores their narratives to examine how their feminist consciousness was expressed or articulated.

Edget Behebret Zemecha: the sexual liberation of women?

With regard to the effect of the campaign on female students, Guenet Guebre Christos, head of the women's programme and coordinator of the campaign, and one of the five senior managers who designed the campaign, "believes that the campaign was an eye-opener for women and girls and paved the way for liberating Ethiopian women" (NEWA 2012).

In a subsequent informal conversation in a social gathering, Guenet clarified what she meant when she affirmed that the campaign was liberating for women.[70] First, the campaign was not limited to male students and therefore allowed students, particularly female students, to experience the freedom of a life away from home that they acquired with access to university. "For us,

[70] I met W/ro Guenet Guebre Christos for the first time during a Christmas visit to Ethiopia in 2004/2005 at my unofficial advisor's house. Over the years, I saw her at the same place on a few occasions; however, when we met again on 12th December 2012, when both of us were visiting the same friend, little did I know that she could be a potential candidate for my research. Our host, who knew about my project, told her that I was researching Ethiopian women activists and invited her to tell me stories about the time she was head of the women's section of the national Development through Cooperation Campaign. That is the first time that she shared some revealing stories relevant in terms of Ethiopian women's liberation.

the problem came because we had never left our homes before", Admas corroborates. Nevertheless, what Guenet wanted to emphasize is the campaign's contribution to the sexual liberation of female students. In fact, despite its peaceful mission, this campaign was met with a lot of resistance from parents. In a country where women have traditionally participated in resistance movements, both in the repeated Italian attempts at colonization and in internal wars, the resistance of society to letting young women go on a comparatively peaceful mission seems strange. Guenet remembers the main problem that parents raised was not the fact of the young generation being sent to rural Ethiopia, but, rather, the idea of young women being sent far away from the protection of the "safe havens" that were their homes. Guenet argues that the issue was not merely posed with regard to their personal safety but rather their honour: in other words, their virginity. For their parents, this was simply an unacceptable situation. But for the organizers of the campaign, and more particularly for those managing the women's section of the programme, the key issue was crystal clear: prevention of unwanted pregnancies. Hence, that brought to the forefront the question of contraception and teaching contraceptive methods to young women participating in the campaign. However, according to Guenet, while obtaining permission to talk to female students about contraceptive methods remained one of the most difficult tasks, transmitting a clear message to young girls who were raised with the belief that it is taboo to talk openly about one's sexuality was another. Nevertheless, the result was more than satisfying. Of approximately twenty thousand young female campaigners, fewer than a hundred became pregnant and all of them decided to continue with their pregnancy and eventually kept their child, despite the fact that they were given the choice of giving their children up for adoption. Hence, the implication is that decisions such as providing contraceptive methods to young women precipitated the sexual liberation of young women campaigners by providing them with the means to control their reproductive capacity and hence their bodies.

From the students' perspective, two stories about the campaign told by the revolutionary activists seem to corroborate Guenet's account in different

ways. The first story illustrates the ambiguous stand of our participant. On the one hand, the story confirms Guenet's suggestion about the campaign's contribution to the sexual liberation of the "female students" since it reveals that the campaign was mockingly re-baptized the "*edget behebret yefikirna yemewaledja zemecha*" (loose translation: the development through cooperation, love and reproduction campaign) by the students. On the other hand, it also supports the idea that the parents' fear about their daughters' honour being compromised was justified, as the participant adds that

> a lot of women were exposed to pregnancy. They did not have the proper knowledge or the experience to deal with this kind of problem. It was like standing outside naked. So parents worrying for their daughters were a normal reaction.

The second story presented a more nuanced consequence of the campaign, more confirmatory of Guenet's view about young women's empowerment through information/education about contraceptive methods and hence the control of their bodies/sexuality. Nevertheless, the specific story also reveals the paternalist attitudes expressed by some of their male peers. In this case, it is about the action or reaction of a male team leader, formerly identified as a "Revo". One day, a group of female campaigners were returning to their base from a day of work when they found all their belongings had been moved from the house they were sharing and transferred to the front of a small hut located close by: the hut allocated to the team leader. In fact, someone had found some kind of contraceptive equipment in the female students' premises. Thus, the team leader had taken upon himself the responsibility of protecting the female members of his team by keeping a close eye on their sleeping arrangements. That was the reason for the transfer. The point our participant wanted to make was that, as a former Revo, he should have approached this differently – that is, he should have treated them as his equals and partners in the campaign. He should have accepted that the female members of his team had a right and were able to decide whether they want to have sexual relationships or not. It was not his responsibility to guard their virginity or their sexual behaviour. Hence, Revo or not, it seems that the concept of equality preached in the leftist ideology was in this case overridden by the role he perceived himself to have as the

protector of the “weaker sex”, which he manifestly acquired through socialization.

It is true that this is a retrospective reconstruction of a story, which makes it difficult to affirm whether or not this story expressed or showed the level of feminist consciousness shaping the thinking of the group of female students during that specific period. It is also difficult to assume that it was their level of awareness of the meaning of this newly acquired freedom that allowed them to control their sexuality. What is clear, though, is their awareness of the overreaction of their team leader and his paternalist attitude towards them, which they realized was an overreaction and which they therefore criticized.

Feminism within political parties opposing the Derg

“This is exactly the history of women. It was contained” (Rahel 2013).

Admas is one of the few revolutionary activists interviewed who described herself as a feminist; however, the way the revolutionaries think and act suggests that they are indeed feminists or that their actions are informed by a feminist agenda. In other words, as seen in their narratives, the women activists recognized women as an oppressed group. They were conscious of and denounced the subordinate position of women in Ethiopian society, as well as the male-dominated political organizations to which they belonged. They believed in and advocated the equality of women with men. They encouraged and promoted the participation of women in the workforce to improve the socio-economic conditions of women in society. The difference with the pioneers was their conviction that the emancipation of women could only be attained through structural change, within a more egalitarian and/or socialist system. The implication is one of class prioritization over gender, which suggests that their perceptions of women’s oppression, as well as their actions, were informed by Marxist analysis.

Similar to the declaration expressed in Martha’s manifesto, the revolutionary women activists’ analysis of Ethiopian society derives from an imported ideology. That is, most of them were guided by Marxist theory, which viewed Ethiopian society as feudal and in which the oppression of women was

analysed without looking at the particular history of Ethiopian women and gender relations in the country. The suggestion is that this could be the effect of the westernization process, which may also in part be responsible for the fact that they did not take into consideration past Ethiopian women's experiences and position. The adoption of a Marxist approach and view definitely had a limiting effect on the way they perceived and investigated their society.

Nevertheless, although they were inspired by the Marxist discourse of women's oppression, they did not articulate clearly a Marxist feminist agenda as described in the literature of the second wave of the women's movement of the 1960s. They acknowledged and promoted women's productive role, but, similar to the pioneers, without questioning the cultural belief that ascribed the responsibility for the home or domestic sphere exclusively to women, perhaps because the division of labour as prescribed by Marxist feminist analysis did not exist in Ethiopia? Evidently, the majority of Ethiopian women who live in rural Ethiopia, as well as urban poor women, are in charge of the household chores and caregiving of the family. However, Ethiopian women had always assumed productive roles usually ascribed to the male domain, including the agrarian sector. As Rahel argues,

> Actually, recent studies show that women farmers in less developed countries constitute up to 80% of the workforce in the agriculture sector, but we have made them sort of accept that they are not working. Yeah, the women tell you they have nothing to do with *teffe* [a cereal produced in Ethiopia] production. Really? Who removes weeds? Who helps in the fields during the crop season?

It can therefore be argued that, to a certain extent, the revolutionaries did not have the time to push their analysis further and develop a critique of the division of labour as the site of women's oppression. However, similar to western radical feminists, Ethiopian revolutionary women's analysis located women's oppression in patriarchy. For Rahel, "feminism is an agenda that has to deal with patriarchy". On the other hand, unlike radical feminists' school of thought, they did not raise the issues of sexuality or reproductive rights, etc. Rahel explained that

> You know you can't talk about agency, you can't talk about space, you can't talk about reproductive rights, you cannot talk about any of these issues. It was all around economic empowerment, the social and economic needs of women, and it's not even political. That was something I realized very quickly.

Consequently, it can be argued that they opted neither for a Marxist nor a radical analysis; rather, it seems that they acted according to the context and issues that they considered relevant to Ethiopian women's lives. That does not mean they were not feminist or that they rejected feminism. On the contrary, their revolutionary action for social justice in general and concern for women's issues in particular makes them no less feminist than any predefined feminist category. Nor does it suggest that they are unique but, rather, that they practise a feminism that, to a certain extent, takes into account the context within which they operate.

The suggestion is, therefore, that the revolutionary women activists, just by being who they were and acting the way they did, were able to demonstrate not only what women can do but also a different form of feminism. Hence, they became the critical, motivated, aspiring women promoted by the pioneers and more as they expanded their role by seeking revolutionary measures to bring about justice and equality, as opposed to their elders, who relied on charitable organizations to improve the socio-economic conditions of women. Moreover, for the first time women were recognized as a category, which contributed to the politicization process of women. Although the women's wings of the different movements served/remained as arms of their organizations, it gave the revolutionaries the space and context in which to form connections and relationships based on a political rather than social agenda. "We even understand our silences", says Lemlem in her narrative of the lifetime friendships that were formed during those times, thus supporting this claim.

To sum up, the revolutionary women activists in this study, whether they were from EPRP, Meison or TPLF, were revolutionaries in thought and action. They fought for structural change through collective action to achieve social justice in general and equality of women in particular. In order to do so, they organized, formed study groups or cells, raised their own political

consciousness first, and in the process created strong relationships and friendships, which allowed the creation of a small movement, based on their shared experiences yet "contained" within their respective bigger organizations. Hence, they can be classified neither as liberal, Marxist nor radical feminists but, as suggested by Tesfa, one of our TPLF activists, they are, rather, "pragmatists". She seems to imply that they should be defined by their action rather than any discourse, which, in the case of TPLF women revolutionaries (explored below), worked against them, serving as the catalyst for a backlash that continues even today.

The liberation of women within TPLF: backlash against feminist trends?

> Once this label [feminism] was given to our activities, we realized that we no longer had the support of some of the leadership. We realized they did not like the way we thought and the way we acted. (Tesfa)

With more than 30% of its combatants being women, and a thriving women's organization among its structures, the analysis of Tesfa's narrative in relation to TPLF's women's agenda, suggests TPLF had a more grounded feminist agenda. In addition to all their achievements in terms of organizing women in the liberated areas, the revolutionary women combatants were able to convince the leadership of TPLF that they, the women guerrilla fighters themselves, needed their own organization. They argued that there were issues specific to women that they needed to address. Hence, the question of organization came from women themselves. In this way, they were able to identify issues such as male chauvinism and female submissiveness as being relevant to the emancipation of women. The conclusion of the first conference illustrates the success of their organizing. Here is what Aklile thought about their organization:

> We really appreciated and supported that organization. I cannot tell you how the love and trust we shared was so strong. It [TPLF's women's organization] was everything to us; if we had challenges, it gave us the space to share them, or get support. More specifically, in relation to capacity building the women's organization had played a great role. It was a serious organization; it was not about getting together and chatting. We discussed our performance, how is so-and-so doing? All our agendas were about the struggle. Hence, when there was a strong combatant somewhere, whichever regiment she

> belonged to, even if we didn't know what she looked like, we would know her name and her heroic deeds.

Therefore, the women's organization not only presented feminist agendas relevant to the women fighters' realities, but also offered them the space to reflect on and share their experiences, as well as to form sisterly relationships. Similar to the women EPRP/Meison activists, TPLF women fighters were able to use the women's organization and create a network of support and friendship.

"With regard to the feminist issue, we responded that we were not feminists but, rather, pragmatists, who did our best to find solutions to the problems that arose" says Tesfa. As seen in her narrative, in chapter five, she enumerates the action they took in order to find solutions to the problems they were facing, particularly the difficulties of finding a workforce for farming activities, since most of the youth had joined TPLF, leaving only the elderly, young women and mothers to take care of the agriculture. Therefore, their solution, which they acknowledged was short term, consisted of the redistribution of the different farming activities and allowing women to openly perform activities traditionally allocated to men. "But this did not work. Looking back, I think we were too radical in those days," concludes Tesfa.

Consequently, it did not take too long for those opposed to this organizing to counter-attack. It came with the call for the second conference of the women's organization. Tesfa's narrative reveals the culmination of a backlash that erupted during that conference in which she and her collaborators were accused of bringing about feminist trends: in other words, they had created awareness and promoted the equality of women in all sectors of life. They had questioned patriarchy and its anchored cultural values by denouncing male chauvinism and women's inferior positioning. Consequently, they succeeded in awakening the Tigrayan women's consciousness and provoked a change of attitude by making sure women participated fully in the public sphere.

Aklile and Woode's narratives corroborate her story. Not only were Tesfa and her peers of the time (with the support of the TPLF leadership) able to

raise awareness of the women of the TPLF-controlled liberated areas but most importantly they were seen as the role models of the younger generation of women who joined the struggle. Both Aklile and Woode firmly state in their narratives their esteem and admiration for these educated young women from the cities who left everything to fight for them. We can therefore argue that they, and by extension TPLF, indeed had a feminist agenda.

In relation to the second conference of TPLF's women's organization, though, their narrative suggests their awareness of the purpose of the conference. They revealed how strongly the women combatants in particular were opposed to the ejection of the women heading the women's organization, and they concurred that the conference lasted so long because of the heated discussions and disagreements with the leadership of the organization. But finally, the leadership succeeded in getting rid of the revolutionary activists who displayed feminist trends and replaced them with women who, they assumed, had a similar vision and agenda for the women's organization to their own. In this way, this vigorous feminist women's organization was co-opted by the larger structure, which effectively tried to erase feminism or what had been identified as feminist trends within TPLF.

Another example, which marked the beginning of the end of the feminist tendencies of the organization, is the ending of the policy that prohibited marriage between members of the organization. When TPLF decided to overturn this 10-year-old policy, "women combatants were the ones who strongly opposed this policy change", Woode affirms. The women combatants defended their position by presenting three arguments against the change. First, they argued that there were fewer women than men fighters, and therefore this could destroy the cohesion of the group by introducing individualistic interests, to the detriment of common engagement with their cause. Second, with marriage comes pregnancy and children, which would have the effect of limiting the women combatants to their caregiving roles. The implication was clear to them: the struggle had accelerated the liberation of Tigrayan women from their traditional roles, but

they immediately saw that the new proposal meant them going back to the old ways.

> When this question came to us combatants, we were surprised and distressed. What does this mean for us? We left our homes to participate in the armed struggle, not to get married. We did not get into this because of a shortage of males. That was our first reaction. After thinking it through, we [the women combatants] understood that this implied a backlash [*tchanaw temelelso wedegna endemeta geban*], a return to the old ways. (Woode)

A story in Aklile's narrative also illustrates how joining the armed struggle was seen as a means of liberation for young women who were traditionally married off at an early age. When Aklile joined the army, she declares, she was no more than 14 or 15 years old. She escaped from her family with another young woman who was about three or four years older than her. The young woman in question had been married the year that both girls decided to run away from home to join TPLF. "She was also running away from her marriage, at the time I did not know that," Aklile recounts. Although this story cannot be generalized, it is indicative of where their resistance came from. The majority of TPLF's women and men fighters came from a peasant background and shared the same cultural values and knew the expectations of society. Although the women fighters did not openly criticize the institution of marriage as such, their resistance shows their distrust, as they seemed to perceive it as a site of discrimination, in which they were reduced primarily to their traditional reproductive roles. This certainly confirms how participation in the armed forces in general and the women's organization in particular contributed to their feminist consciousness.

Nonetheless, such rejection of centuries-old taboos and acceptance of a new egalitarian rule in such a short period seems a little too easy. Perhaps the complexity of women in Ethiopian society was not limited to those women who were middle-class and/or educated. Thus, the seeds of resistance to oppression or patriarchy were already sown in their heritage. The novelty is that, in this case, through the experience of the armed struggle, they found a space to share their reflections and experiences.

Where are TPLF's women fighters? Where have they gone, is the most frequently asked question we hear in the few feminist-oriented forums[71] I have attended this past year. Tsereha, one of our participants, raised the same question during our conversation in 2014. She recognized that there were few of them during the transitional period but she wondered where they had gone since. As seen in the extract from Woode's narrative in chapter four, the demobilization process, which dismissed more than four thousand women guerrilla fighters, could be part of the explanation. Another explanation emanates from structural factors that draw on patriarchy to put them slowly but surely in their "rightful place" by becoming first and foremost wives and mothers. In addition to this need to conform to their gender roles, the majority lacked education, making it a lot harder for them to break away from all these factors and continue their emancipation. That is unfortunate since their participation and heroic action had impacted not only on the emancipation of women in general but also on women's the imaginary or more precisely their understanding of what they were capable of and could achieve.

But for some, it was just a continuation of the process that started during the second conference. When asked this same question, former TPLF guerrilla fighter W/ro Mebrat Beyene[72] stated that she sincerely believed that the backlash started during that second conference, when the leadership of the women's organization was accused of some "errors" and as a result were pushed out from their position. She did not say what their errors were, but she affirmed that this marked the beginning of the end of TPLF's vigorous women's organization – in other words, of its feminist agenda.

To sum up, what emerges from the narrative of TPLF's women guerrilla fighters is that participation in the armed struggle indeed contributed to their emancipation, and to the awakening of the feminist consciousness in particular but also that of the Tigrayan women in general. Their narratives

[71] Discussion forums organized by AWiB on issues such as "The dearth of women in leadership in Ethiopia" (March 25/2016) or "Ethiopian feminism" (March 10/2016).

[72] She was one of the three speakers invited onto discussion forums organized by AWiB on the topic of "The dearth of women in leadership in Ethiopia" (March 25/2016).

have also revealed the use of reflective and pragmatic approaches to solve issues relevant to the Tigrayan people in general and Tigrayan women in particular, including the women fighters themselves. Through women's organizing, they created a group consciousness on which they relied to build support and form relationships. Consequently, it can be affirmed that TPLF's women guerrilla fighters' feminism is more or less similar to what Mikell (2003: 103) identifies as African feminism, which is a "feminism that is political, pragmatic, reflexive and group oriented".

Feminism in "socialist" Ethiopia

The Revolution of 1974 did indeed have a deep impact on Ethiopian society. Change had occurred in all sectors of social life and had an effect on the political social and economic levels. Women's lives had been affected by the Revolution. The Revised Constitution of 1955 had been discarded. Yet, as some scholars have argued, the woman question was for the first time put on the national agenda. REWA was established at all levels of the political institutions to raise women's consciousness of their political, economic, social and democratic rights. Women were thus organized from kebele to national level under REWA, which played a considerable role in mobilizing and organizing its members. According to the1989 (1981 Ethiopian calendar) REWA report, the organization had registered 5,226,995 members at the different levels of its structure (Women's Affairs Office at the Prime Minister's Office 2007).

Moreover, REWA's declared role as the politicizing and organizing arm of the party, similar to that of TPLF's women's organization, seems to have contributed to the acceleration of women's emancipation in general and their feminist consciousness in particular. Hence, again it has created a space in which women can raise issues relevant to their lives.

Sehin is the only activist in this study who was not only a party cadre for the Derg but who also occupied a leadership position at the national level, serving on different committees taking care of political issues. Although our conversation lasted over two and half hours, her account of her cadre years did not last long and was limited to the few lines in the extract presenting her

revolutionary activist days in chapter five. Understandably, she seems shy about elaborating on her experiences, despite her years of activism within the party. Nonetheless, embedded in her narrative we could read not only the context but also her personal growth. She reveals that at first she did not know anything but learned to become articulate and to act in the process. In this way, her recruitment within this organ in particular was empowering but also conducive to the raising of her feminist consciousness.

> Then this thing got into me; the more I participated in different committees, the more I became vocal and articulate. I honestly don't know how. It grows into you; as they say, you learn by doing. We had no training, but one constant reality, basically that is your life ["*nurosh new*"] …
>
> I think that was why I was labelled or categorized as a feminist …
>
> When I look deep into me, of course in practice I am [a feminist]. But if you have to have a category of feminist activism, it is feminism that has emanated from socialist theories and the Revolution. (Sehin)

Hence, this is Sehin's account of her activism, which eventually led her to feminist tendencies informed by socialist ideology. Her testimony shows that one learns to become an activist. In her case, in the process of being a party cadre she learned to become an activist who would gradually become concerned with the specific issue of Ethiopian women's conditions. What she called, "this thing" is her growing concern for the status of women. On the other hand, what can we understand from her statement that "it is feminism that has emanated from socialist theories and the revolution"?

In an attempt to comprehend Sehin's statement, I had to refer to an analysis of a speech made by Sehin's role model, Tiruwork Wakeyo. When we look at Tiruwork Wakeyo's[73] speech given at a symposium on the struggle for peace, organized for the 8th March celebrations in 1982 by REWA, the gender discourse seen above is reiterated: women are clearly seen as a

[73] Tiruwork Wakeyo is the woman mentioned several times in Sehin's narrative; in fact, she is described as the woman who inspired Sehin to become like her. At the time of the speech she was the only woman member of the central committee of COPWE and head of the women's section. She was recommended to me by three of my participants as a woman who could give me interesting information about REWA and its role. At the time of the interview I was informed that she was accompanying her husband abroad for personal reasons.

social category of the society that was exploited/oppressed by the feudalist system. However,

> the question of women is inseparably bound up with the overall problem of society and … the emancipation of women can be realized only in a society that has rid itself of oppression; and … there is no women's question independent of the aspiration and general condition of the masses. (Tiruwork 1982: 31)

Certainly, the woman question is raised as an issue but class difference rather than gender subordination was taken as the main challenge facing society. Nonetheless, Tiruwork's speech reveals some of the challenges lying ahead and the possible solutions proposed by the socialist philosophy. Hence, she identifies "deeply embedded prejudices of society on the question of women", as well as male chauvinism, which effectively reduces women to subordination and submissiveness. Therefore, she proposes "sustained education and propaganda" for women to realize their place in society, and participation in the workforce for them to gain "economic independence". In addition, she recognizes "the burden of the domestic work", for which she recommends the creation of childcare facilities to establish favourable conditions for the full participation of women in the public sphere. Consequently, although once again their emancipation is equated with the idea of women's productive role, there is a slight improvement on or difference from the pioneers, whose discourse promoted women's participation in the workforce without questioning the impact of their domestic and caregiving role in this endeavour. On the other hand, in her speech Tiruwork not only recognizes women's domestic burden but also offers (ideas for) solutions.

"*Set be setnetwa tikebere*" (literally, "respect for women as women") is a motto that Sehin eventually gave up for "*set be sewenetwa tikeber*" (which could be translated as "respect for women's rights as human rights"), drawing on this socialist philosophy. This also illustrates the evolution of her thinking that occurred over time. Most Ethiopians who lived or grew up during that time are likely to remember this revolutionary motto reiterated over and over in the media or during the kebele-level Marxist–Leninist theory awareness-raising sessions conducted through urban dwellers associations

(UDAs)[74] such as women's associations. The other tangible information that derives from Sehin's narrative and Tiruwork's speech is the literacy programme in which Sehin and her friend Martha participated. In fact, in his opening speech of the symposium for the 1985 Nairobi Conference, Berhanu Beyeh[75] stated that "to this effect the government had launched the mass literacy programme that aimed to reduce the 97% of illiterate women that the previous regime had omitted to include in the development activities of the country" (*Ethiopian Herald* 1985). It is true that the National Literacy Programme was one of the programmes that succeeded in giving uneducated women access to education. It is also true that, according to the recommendations of the 1985 World Women's Report, the education of women (along with health and employment policies) represented one of the major axes of the struggle for the equality of women. From this perspective, the above-mentioned literacy policy seems to have matched the world report recommendations.

This brings us to the second point, which concerns the revolutionary government's position with regard to international agreements and influences. Despite the Derg's rejection of western (read: capitalist and/or imperialist) political discourse, the influence of international organizations with regard to gender relations was clear and their recommendations were taken seriously. The number of newspaper articles[76] that were dedicated to the UN Decade for Women may illustrate a certain continuity in the positioning of Ethiopia with regard to its relation with international organizations and the international community. It seems that the need of the revolutionary government for international recognition was as important as, if

[74] UDAs assist and encourage the formation of women's and other associations. Their objective is to enable the broad masses to organize and administer their own affairs and to develop their ideology in line with socialist philosophy with the view of enabling them to struggle against feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism.

[75] Berhanu Beyeh was a member of the political bureau of the central committee of the Workers Party of Ethiopia and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs; he gave the opening speech at a two-day symposium organized by REWA to prepare for the 1985 Nairobi Conference that concluded the Decade for Women.

[76] For example: *Ethiopian Herald* (1985) Women's question should be viewed from broad perspective: symposium underway at NCCP. Saturday 8 June; *Ethiopian Herald* (1985) A decade for women. Saturday 15 June, Melkam-Tessfa (1985) Global concern for the condition of women in the world. *Ethiopian Herald*, Saturday 15 June

not more important than, that of the previous regime. Hence, in this instance, the Derg's gender discourse was fairly similar to the discourse articulated by international organizations, particularly when the discourse could be interpreted as complementary to that stated by the revolutionary Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE). The newspaper coverage of the symposium states that the objective of the symposium was to inform participants how the revolutionary government's achievements of the last 10 years with regard to women's issues, corresponded exactly with the objectives of the 1985 Nairobi Conference, which marked the end of a 10-year effort to improve the status of women. As one of the founding members of the UN, Ethiopia has made every effort to implement UN resolutions of promoting the equality of women and their contribution towards peace and development. "The Ethiopian Revolution has created favourable conditions for the realization of the objectives of the Decade as it recognizes the participation of women in all sectors of life," concludes Melkam-Tesfa (1985) in her article entitled "Global concern for the condition of women in the world".

The reference to the 1985 World Women's Report continues in the article entitled "Women and children first", in which the author highlights the key points of the report with regard to the education and healthcare of women. The article also exposes the four different roles of women: their biological role, as mothers; their domestic role – that is, cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood; their social role, teaching healthy habits; and finally their traditional role as midwives. This article is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, these roles associated with women do not emphasize the producing role of women outside the household but, rather, embrace their traditional roles as mothers, wives and, more specifically, caregivers of the family/community. If we push the argument further, the idea of African/Ethiopian women as primitive social entities with no economic role or power emerges. Consequently, in this article not only are women confined to the private sphere but also their responsibility for the private sphere is taken for granted. In fact, even the producer role allocated to women in Tiruwork's speech is not recognized. That leads to us to question whether the role of women as producers is simply rhetorical or a real political stance. In this

respect, it seems that there is more continuity with the traditional view of women's place in Ethiopian society, rather than change. It can also be argued that the rhetoric contained in this article, instead of creating a space for change, reinforces traditional beliefs and norms.

The second particularly points to a discussion about the benefits of education as "a catalyst multiplying the effects of other improvement in women's lives" and "primary healthcare" described as a new approach that tackles the causes of disease rather than just concentrating on cures. "Setting the notion of equality aside, spending on services for women may be the most sensible investment a government can make", argues the author. This argument, which leans towards a compromise or ambivalence between the notion of equality and women's entitlement to education and basic healthcare, uncovers the difficulty that strategic gender needs encounter when confronted with the basic gender needs that affect the lives of the majority of Ethiopian women.

What emerges from the information gathered from Sehin's narrative, Tiruwork's speech and the newspaper articles is that after the few years of turmoil of the Red Terror the Derg managed to develop an articulated gender discourse based on Marxist theories. Consequently, although women were able to organize, they were restricted to acting within REWA, a structure established by the Derg to support the objectives of the worker's party. It certainly allowed women to raise their awareness of the oppression of women in the previous regimes, but it failed to give them freedom of thought, restricting them to thinking and acting within Marxist ideology. Nevertheless, the quest for international recognition opened a small window of opportunity, in which the revolutionary women supporting the Derg were able to raise certain issues with no contradiction of the official line of the worker's party.

In this way, they were able to organize and participate in the literacy campaign for women. They were also able to open childcare facilities to allow women's participation in the workforce. Moreover, as seen in Sehin's narrative, for the first time they were able to place the issue of domestic violence on the public agenda. However, all these feminist agendas were

constrained and could rightfully be called, as Sehin states, “a feminism that has emanated from socialist theories and the revolution”. Subsequently, while Sehin managed to leave the party discreetly after a few years of service, Tiruwork remained with the party until EPRDF took power in 1991 and put her in prison with the other high-ranking members of the Derg. And as Emebet noted, despite all its achievements in terms of organizing and mobilizing more than five million women, it did not take long for REWA to be dismantled and collapse like a house of cards.

To sum up, when we look at the narratives of the revolutionary activists during both the student movement and the revolutionary period, there emerges an image of politically engaged women activists who went through an intense politicization period in which they became aware of the subordinate position of women in Ethiopian society in general and within their respective movements/parties and or guerrilla movements in particular. Through the process of observation, reflexivity and their particular experiences in collective and radical actions, they developed what Crossley (2003) calls “radical habitus”. With that predisposition at hand, and armed with a Marxist–Leninist ideology, they conducted a critical analysis of the conditions of women in Ethiopia. Despite the fact that their political activism in the various revolutionary movements accelerated the raising of their feminist consciousness process, their investigation of the conditions of women in Ethiopia was limited as it was informed by the Marxist–Leninist perspective to which they adhered. In other words, their investigation was based on a Marxist–Leninist analysis of the oppression of women.

The suggestion is that this partly led them to neglect looking at the specific experience of oppression of Ethiopian women, which effectively limited their analysis because it made it in some ways incomplete. Consequently, in addition to the resilience of the patriarchy (which is translated in the attribution of gender roles and identified behaviours such as male chauvinism and women’s submissiveness, for example) with which they were confronted within their respective movements and the Marxist belief that prioritized class struggle over gender inequality, they had to resort to making political manoeuvres and offering solutions that were not

comprehensive enough to solve the various challenges facing Ethiopian women.

Nonetheless, it was during this period that organized awareness sessions on the Marxist–Leninist ideology in general and the Marxist view of women's oppression in particular were delivered to Ethiopian women through the different levels of REWA. In this way, Ethiopian women were made aware of the rhetoric of the equal status of women with men as well as the double oppression they were confronted with in earlier times. Moreover, the productive role was emphasized, at least theoretically if not in practice. Here is what Emebet, former EPRP member imprisoned for more than 11 years by the Derg, has to say about REWA's achievements:

> I can say that I am a symbol for victims of the Derg's oppression, but even I can see that then there were some things going on in this country to improve women's cause. We can say it was successful or not. That is another story. But they [members of REWA] were able to organize about five million women. I have gone and talked to some of the women. They were surprised to see me; they did not expect my visit. Anyway, we have to recognize they were vocal about the issue of women and were able to create some form of awareness, but when you ask what did they gain? Of course, some had gained but they were there primarily to support the Derg's structure, if you look up how much money they were able to raise, it's incredible!

In this short extract, Emebet once again demonstrates the need to acknowledge the achievements of her peers. Despite the fact that they were members of the previous totalitarian regime, they contributed to improving the status of women. She also recognizes the women's ability to organize and mobilize women to raise funds, even if this was in response to the different calls made by the party.

Similarly, TPLF conducted consciousness-raising sessions both within TPLF and TPLF-controlled areas. As seen in the narratives of our three TPLF women combatants, the issue of equality and women's participation in the public sphere were promoted and efforts were made to realize it. Subsequently, we can argue that in both TPLF- and Derg-controlled areas efforts were made to pursue a feminist agenda focused on the political and economic factors effectively accelerating the feminist consciousness of

Ethiopian women. Nonetheless, in both cases the feminist nature of their agenda has been deliberately hidden. Mikell (2003: 109), in her study on African feminism and the emergence of feminist consciousness in Nigeria and Monrovia, argues that "to a large extent much of the emerging feminist consciousness and movement towards feminist agendas in each country remain hidden". Similarly, we have seen how in Ethiopia, during the imperial period, the pioneers played with the name of their organization to hide the fact that they were engaged in rehabilitating women who were engaged in/forced into prostitution after the liberation of the Italian occupation. During the Derg period, all the revolutionaries from the different movements were constrained both by their Marxist–Leninist perspective and their respective organizations. The TPLF example is also an illustration of this method, as the TPLF women's leadership were forced to deny their "feminist tendencies" and constrained into arguing that they were only being "pragmatic". What will be the future of the next generation of women activists? How did the negotiators come to be feminists? Did they claim or hide/deny their feminist tendencies?

Negotiators' feminist positioning

Seizing political opportunities

One can argue that political opportunity was created for women when the new transitional government decided to establish a Women's Affairs Office at the Prime Minister's Office. Subsequently, the EPDRF transitional government appointed no other than former EPRP member Emebet, whom it had just released from prison, to become the head of the WAO. For Emebet, the foundation for all the transformational changes that followed in the legal arena is the National Women's Policy. Her achievement in the design of the policy rests in her capacity to appeal to different groups of women and institutions' expertise and convince them to work together to articulate and write the policy. In addition to the support of CERTWID, Emebet adds,

> The UN bodies … have given us technical support … but there were also some individual women working in the UN that I can name, like Zewde Abegas and Mulu Godjam, who participated. No matter what their personal stand about the new government, their capacity and

> technical know-how was there. They have also facilitated us to obtain the budget for some of our programmes.

Accordingly, Emebet adds that when designing the women's policy, their strategy was to mandate the WAO to create a social movement – a movement that would have a snowball effect, allowing different groups of women to get organized. In this form, political parties could have their own women's organizations as well. This would give them the chance to recruit women and, depending on their programmes and actions, win the confidence of a majority of them. Hence, it was in this context that one of the first women's organizations, the EWLA, which is mentioned in many of the women activists' narratives, was established in 1995, opening the door for others to follow suit. During the 10 years that followed the ratification of the 1994 Ethiopian Constitution, many more women's organizations were established in both the rights-based and development-oriented arenas. As seen in Almaze's narrative, the various women's organizations made a concerted effort to improve the political, economic and social status of Ethiopian women. A frequently cited example of their cooperation and partnership is the demonstration against domestic violence organized under the leadership of EWLA in 2001. Several of our interviewees, including Almaze, Rahel, Fawsia, Ababa and Lemlem, talked about this specific event, not only as a well-organized protest but also as an awareness-creating opportunity both for the general public and for women in particular. Fawsia and Ababa's organizations resulted from the success of this movement.

The second political opportunity was presented to women in the form of the Constitutional Commission, on which women were granted three seats. Here is how Emebet describes the story behind articles 35 and 36 of the 1994 Constitution and, in a way, refutes Biseswar's (2011: 27) thesis, which states that "their [educated women's] lack of leadership, critical thinking, feminist consciousness and a clear vision for women's emancipation, has resulted in them continuing to be side-lined and manipulated". Emebet argues:

> The constitutions of the emperor and Derg periods had shortcomings. We had identified 27 very discriminative articles. It was based on those shortcomings that our work began. In the draft of the new constitution, one of the articles put together women, children and the

> disabled, that was how it was written. So we said no. Children should have their own provision, the same for women and the disabled. We insisted that there was no way that the three groups should have the same provision. You know, even some of the respected or wise members as (Ato[77] X *enekowan*) of the commission asked us to be a little bit more cooperative and compromising. I said if even you (Ato X) would not understand, who else would? After a vigorous discussion and a lot of arguing, finally the provisions of articles 35 and 36 were included. Once that was done, we started mobilizing to promote these provisions, by having them printed out on children's notebooks, hence that was what we called the sensitization process.

In this extract Emebet discloses that the women sitting on the commission (assisted by her office) reviewed both the 1955 and 1987 constitutions and built on them to propose more comprehensive legal protection for women. Hence, they neither rejected nor reproduced all previous provisions, but, rather, built on their limitations. Their proposals were not met without resistance. We can see that the women sitting on the constitutional commission had to argue and convince the other members of the commission in order to obtain the above-mentioned provisions. Once these provisions were included, Emebet and her team did not stop there; they proceeded to the promotion and implementation phase. As we saw in chapter seven, one of the negotiators, Ababa, depicts a similar experience when defending the interests of women during the designing of the National Poverty Reduction Policy. The point is that when both Emebet and Ababa, who were both representing women's organizations, the WAO and an NGO respectively, raised disagreements, their challengers automatically appealed to their sense of cooperation and/or capacity to compromise. Arguments often displayed by men could be considered as unreasonable when coming from women. "You are too demanding, you should loosen up a bit", Ababa was told. Thus, as Emebet and Ababa's experience shows, when women are in these positions of responsibility, defending women's interests in policymaking, they have to struggle and resist opposition based on the political location of women in this society. Hence, they are not the elite women constantly criticized for representing their own interests; rather, they stand as a minority, representing the interests of women. Contrary to

[77] "Ato" is the English-language equivalent of "Mr".

Biseswar (2011), I would argue that, historically, Ethiopian women have struggled and resisted patriarchy, which structures both the state and religious ideology. I shall demonstrate how Ethiopian women, particularly the activists in this research, struggled against the resilience of patriarchy, constantly negotiating women's rightful place in Ethiopian society.

Moreover, the extract is also a testimony that the political opportunities were there, but women had to seize these opportunities to succeed, which they apparently did with regard to the legal arena. As for the argument that educated women have always been instrumentalized by the state and religion, another suggestion might be to look deeper, as seen with the pioneers' activities and revolutionary women's experiences, at how Ethiopian women in general and elite women in particular have historically struggled, resisted, negotiated and manoeuvred through the cultural, religious and political norms that have restricted them to subordinate and submissive positions. Better and closer scrutiny will demonstrate the complex positioning of Ethiopian women in that society. In other words, although there is no doubt that Ethiopian women are suppressed by the patriarchal structure of the society, they have never ceased to struggle and/or negotiate to obtain certain liberties (access to property/land ownership, limited access to the political arena, divorce rights) that were inaccessible to women in other parts of the world. Consequently their location of oppression should not be taken out of its context but, rather, should be analysed in all its complexity. For example, assuming that we categorize the participants of this research as being among the educated/intellectual women Biseswar (2011) is referring to, the narratives of both the former revolutionaries and negotiators indicate that they are, on the contrary, not only reflective and pragmatic but also engaged with and committed to the conditions of Ethiopian women. The following story illustrates that their task was not an easy one but also affirms that these women, who are characterized by Biseswar as having been manipulated, responded to challenges and fought for their cause:

> Meles had written this book on the 20-year strategic plan. We were told to read it and give our comments. All of us in the women's ministry departments read the book, wrote our comments after we had a group discussion on the content of the book. You know, in this

document about the government's 20-year strategy for the country, at no point were women's issues raised, none. When education was mentioned, nothing on girls' education, the same for health issues, and nothing that says that we emphasize women's reproductive health, for example. You know, in all the sector programmes, nothing. Not even in the preamble. At the end, on the right to organize, women were finally mentioned. So in our feedback we stressed that specific point and then we argued that, first of all, this 20-year strategy, a strategy that tries to plan the next 20 years, if it does not include women in all the sectors mentioned above how could we work for development? There is no shortcut for development. It's about inclusion. Development is inclusion, including women, including children, including youth; therefore, this strategy does not show this inclusion. Second, even if it was written on the preamble that all sectors would look at gender/women's issues in this way or that way, we would have felt a little better. But in this case women were only included with regard to organizing. Getting organized is the prerogative of people. The government's role is creating a conducive environment. This is what the women policy stipulates; therefore, this strategy does not observe that. I remember presenting our feedback and Ato Teferra was the chairman of the meeting; he was so interested that he was listening attentively [*aynun aftito neber yemiyadamitew*]. You know who got up first to destroy me? Women! I can't tell you the virulence of their arguments [*tchefechefugne alkush*]. He defended me by saying "we asked you to read it and give your opinion and she did. And this is not only her opinion but also that of those in her ministry who have debated it. We asked you to do the same, that is all".

I was so surprised by their attack; I said okay, show me where you see women included in the strategy. You see, if it is not written in black and white (clearly) it will evaporate when it gets to the lower levels of the decision-making mechanisms. That was my fear. Finally it was accepted. Later, the PM called a meeting of all ministers and deputy ministers and everyone who was a department head and above in all the ministries. And the women in the meeting who got up said we are satisfied with this strategy and so on and so forth. And yet nothing had been changed from the draft we had read. I raised my hand, he looked at me and allowed me to speak. I said "PM, I beg to differ from all that has been said by my women colleagues here". At that time the women's policy was in its 13th year. I continued "13 years have passed since the women's policy [*keweta*] was launched. This 13-year policy is not reflected in this document. As I have said before, if this is meant for the next 20 years, I would say that there is a huge gap". And I enumerated all the gaps I mentioned before. I said "PM, you know what newspapers are writing about, about water shortages in rural Ethiopia – it has been written that if women organize themselves, they could solve that problem. I hope that they are joking. If the government takes ownership of development issues, the question is, how does it look at this specific issue? The question should be, where does the government take the budget from for

> issues like water supply? Where does this idea come, and how, that it is the responsibility of women's organizations, do they have the capacity, the expertise to do that, realistically? Don't we have expertise or a water development office, shouldn't they have a gender office to look at the gender perspective on these issues? I don't see that in any of the ministries. Unlike my colleagues here, I am not happy, after 13 years, even if all this was mentioned I would not be satisfied, let alone in this situation where women's interests are not included at all". And I sat down. He said, Emebet is right, this should be included in all the sectors, etc. … but it was not included. (Emebet)

What makes this extract interesting is that it is relevant to the complexity of women's position in Ethiopia. Moreover, the meetings mentioned above occurred 13 years after the promulgation of the National Policy on Women. For Emebet, it was also an opportunity for evaluation of their efforts. Hence, when her office was asked to review the text, they did what was expected of them: look at whether the strategic plan included the interests of women. Evidently their analysis found that the plan only mentioned women in relation to the specific point of women's organizing and left out women's gender interests in all the other sectors (health, education, etc.) relevant to their everyday life. As can be expected from any women's affairs mechanism, the WAO highlighted the lack of inclusion of gender perspectives in all the sectors of public affairs. On two occasions, Emebet explained the WAO's point of view; on both occasions, the most virulent criticism came not from the men but from the women, she says.

First, this shows that women do not necessarily support issues related to women's emancipation. Getting women's support is not automatic; one has to discuss issues with them and convince them as well, because they are also the product of this patriarchal society.

The second challenge that Emebet and her colleagues were confronted with is invisibility, or, more precisely, what has been identified as the "voicelessness" of the subaltern (Imran & Taib). On two occasions, Emebet's criticism was accepted as correct. First, the chair of the first meeting, Ato Teferra, the then Minister of Capacity Building, and then PM Meles himself seem to have agreed with her reasoning. Consequently, her feedback should have been included in the final document. Surprisingly, it was not. What does this show us? A variety of suggestions can be made. Among these, Biseswar

(2011) argued that the EPRDF's interest in women's issues is merely superficial, and that mechanisms are established to have direct control of women's emancipation. My argument is that the problem goes beyond party interest: it is anchored in the patriarchal ideology that is still unable to hear the "silenced" voices of the subalterns – women. In other words, the society has yet to learn how to listen to women's voice. Thus, despite their elite/educated locations, Emebet and the other activists are inaudible, because Ethiopian patriarchy has not yet been deeply questioned, and nor has it been sufficiently deconstructed to expose gender-based discriminatory mechanisms that reinforce the domination of men and the subordination of women.

In relation to women's participation in politics and their effectiveness in policymaking, Goetz (1998), who has conducted a comparative analysis of Uganda and South Africa, writes that women's mobilization for social change was translated into the proliferation of women's organizing associations. However, Goetz asserts that women's organizing in such organizations "does not always constitute an effective political base for women's interest in politics" because a range of constraints limit their capacity to act, including double duty and the hostility of male-dominated party politics (p. 243)". Moreover, similar to Ethiopia, in both countries efforts have been registered both in policymaking and in the establishment of institutional mechanisms (affirmative action, women's offices/ministries) in order to encourage and improve women's numerical representation in politics and to promote women's gender interests. That being the case, the number of women in politics has increased, which has consequently improved people's awareness of women's rights and particularly of the issue of violence against women/girls. Nonetheless, Goetz highlights how women's contribution and effectiveness in policymaking and particularly economic planning initiatives remain limited. The implication is that in the long run this compromises women politicians' credibility in their constituencies with regard to their support of gender equity and the promotion of women's gender interests. It also compromises their legitimacy in politics in general and in decision-making positions in particular. It appears that Emebet's and Ababa's

experiences in leadership and policymaking are consistent with Goetz's (1998) description of women in politics in Uganda and South Africa.

In response to Biseswar's (2011) suggestion[78] about the elite/intellectual women's ambiguous positioning and the role of women's machineries as state control mechanisms, Emebet neither denies nor agrees with the analysis; she just assumes that to be the nature of politics and refers back to the women's policy that stipulated that the WAO, now the MoWCYA, was mandated to create a social movement. According to her, the political parties can recruit and organize women to have their own wings, as civil society organizations can; however, she states that "what is happening now though, the various organizations, the ones in government structures, and in civil society, are not vibrant enough". The end result, which was that women's machineries became a state control apparatus, does not, I argue, diminish either the process or the struggle of women such as Emebet and Ababa. The fact that their struggle did not produce the results they fought for should not be considered as the weakness of educated women but as a result of the power imbalance of the time.

Negotiating political space

Another criticism made by Biseswar (2008) of educated/intellectual Ethiopian women is that their activism is based, except for the brief moment of revolutionary times, on careerist rather than collectivist and radical approaches, which implies that their actions are not radical enough to challenge patriarchy. There is some truth in these arguments. The negotiators' actions might not be defined as radical or even collectivist in the western radical feminist sense of the term. Presently, the former revolutionaries who have remained activists and the negotiators no longer call for "revolutionary" actions, since they are probably a bit wary of revolutionary ideals, after Ethiopia's experience of the 1974 Revolution and its consequences. That does not necessarily mean that they do not

[78] I mentioned Biseswar's analysis to Emebet; she just responded that the assertion reflects the ongoing and usually conflicted relationship between civil society organizations and the state in relation to gender. For her, Biseswar has also participated in the often conflicted relationship between state and civil society as she and her partner were heading an NGO called Panos Ethiopia at the time.

sometimes speak their discontent out loud in public. During a recent conference organized by AWiB, Selome Tadesse, an activist and debater on women's issues, wondered "whether women should not also consider armed struggle since it has worked for other struggles" (read: TPLF's experience or other nationalist armed struggles).[79] However, it should be noted that the majority of the women activists interviewed in this study, although not involved in radical collective action, are radical in their daily experience of activism. Below, Lemlem talks about her "work" at EWLA:

> The misery of the situation is such that each occasion engages you to challenge yourself, constantly forcing you to go the extra mile. The problems of the women who came to seek legal aid and advice are not confined to legal problems; some of them needed a place to stay and ended up sleeping in the corridor of our office. There were times we were forced to rent a house to give them somewhere to stay.
>
> Other times, you have to call other organizations asking either for free health services, or even shelter. To the point, sometimes, we asked our members to give a child victim shelter for a few days. What could we do, we could not send them home. Others come covered with blood and the first thing to do then is send them to receive medical care. When you have faced all these challenges there is no way that you stay the same. All this affects you personally and has deep effects on your health, your family life because you have to deal with your own expectations, the women who come to see you and society at large.

In previous chapters we saw Lemlem the revolutionary activist; in this extract she reveals to us the personal face of the women's rights activist. This extract is also an illustration of the former revolutionaries' and negotiators' commitment to their engagement in women's and children's issues. As Lemlem points out, her job is to defend women's rights but the context and/or the circumstances do not allow her to say no, this does not concern me, this is not part of my job description; she does what needs to be done. She goes beyond her role and also takes on her share of social responsibility. For her and her colleagues (she still uses the pronoun "we"),

[79] This sentence was reiterated by Selome Tadesse, a former spokesperson of EPRDF during the 2000–2002 Eritrea and Ethiopia conflict on the platform of one of the meetings organized by AWiB. The statement was made following the intervention of W/ro Mebrat, a former TPLF combatant, after she was asked where the majority of TPLF women combatants were today. In addition to this statement, Selome has offered feminist reflections and analysis on women's experience in leadership positions.

being a women's rights activist is not limited to advocating, lobbying, providing legal advice and, in some cases, defending women in court. Sometimes they are faced with difficult situations in which the urgency is not to do what they are paid to do or what is on their mission statement. They have to take care of their clients' basic needs. It is only after that, that the legal process can take its course. Again, we are exposed to the basic needs vs. strategic needs challenge, in which the legal, social and economic problems are intertwined, forcing the women lawyers to go beyond their expertise and deal with both the legal and the basic needs of women.

Hence, this extract is not only an illustration of the social problems Ethiopian women are confronted with in everyday life but is also a depiction of the social responsibility that women like Lemlem have to assume; taking responsibility for arranging for women to get shelter, or making sure they get medical aid, sometimes paying from their own pocket, or raising money from the staff, is outside their job description, and yet they do it. Making sure that a fistula victim follows up her medical treatment correctly is not part of the deal, yet they do it. Visiting a legal aid client who has just had a baby when they have other cases seems frivolous, but it shows their social commitment and respect for cultural norms that might not necessarily be important to them but are to their clients, and it shows their wisdom, a wisdom that they inherited from their mothers. Taking into account the social norms that are important to their clients not only maintains the bond that exists between generations of women, but also contributes to the creation of a relationship based on trust with the women they serve. In fact, they are playing not only the role of a legal aid provider but also that of a social/community worker. Similar to what Dillard (2000) has called researchers doing "research as responsibility", Lemlem and her colleagues seem to go beyond their responsibilities to provide legal aid and serve those who come to see them. Sometimes they do so to the detriment of their health and family life. Lemlem remembers, for example, her mother asking her "since when are you the solver of all the miseries in the world"? But also shares her regrets about the times she missed out on during her son's childhood years: "Even though I

know he had everything he needed, as a single parent I know for sure that I did not give him all the support he was entitled to while growing up".

The women's rights activists at EWLA not only defend women but also defend children's rights. The reality is that more often than not the women's lives are tightly connected to those of their children and that the women lawyers end up dealing with children's cases, whether they concern rape, child support, early marriage or abduction. Lemlem's commitment to women in general and children in particular is reflected in her strategy, which involves memorizing her cases and never letting go of the human face behind each case:

> So, some of my cases I know them by heart, especially the children's cases. I remember their names and all the details of the crimes committed against them. I feel that I owe it to them because society did not protect them. As a consequence, they have been raped or killed in their tender years. These ones I keep separate. In other cases, related to violence in general for example, I take the facts and talk about their cases as naturally as possible. How? That is because their stories have deeply touched me, what happened to them has affected me. Therefore, I do not need prompting, I just talk about them. At this point, I am no longer talking about cases, but rather about people. People who have come to me, I have seen, and for whom I have done what I can to help. Beside, when talking in public, you need to offer human interest stories because people can somehow relate to them. They can hear and understand human interest stories … They remember cases, not theories. So the first step is taking your cases to heart, talking about it, so that you can raise people's consciousness, raise their awareness.

The suggestion is that all the participants, those who have worked both at EWLA and at the other NGOs that were established after EWLA, describe their "jobs" as part of who they are; as Ababa clearly expresses it, "I wanted work to be an extension of my life, an extension of my needs, my values, and my principles", and Sehin continues "I don't think I am unique; I just had passion for what I do. The passion comes not because I am particularly good; it is because I lived it. It is my life, and as a woman you had to face different type of challenges".

Others, like Gidey, talk about how many times they had to stay at work until midnight attending community or staff meetings and neglecting their family

responsibilities. Those who are married (Gidey, Ababa, Sehin and Yemesserach) extend their appreciation or acknowledgements to their husbands for being understanding of their commitments, which implies their conviction that their husbands are somehow exceptional in accepting their not-so-rare disengagement from family responsibilities. Consequently, they consider themselves as defying the norms that give women the domestic role. The point is that although they might not be considered radical in the radical feminist sense of the term, the women activists in this study are indeed “radicals or revolutionaries” in their actions, in both their public and private lives. Their resistance to patriarchal norms embedded in the different institutions of the society is present in their everyday struggle. They live and work in a patriarchal society, and yet because of their feminist consciousness, based on their reflexivity and sense of responsibility, and the “wisdom” inscribed in local knowledge and most often inherited through the habitus, they can read or understand their environment and manage to bypass patriarchal structure. In this way, Ethiopian women activists struggle, resist and sometimes negotiate with structures such as the state and religious institutions shaped by deeply anchored patriarchal ideology

One of the assumptions of this study is that Ethiopian women’s activism in general, and feminist activism in particular, is contingent on the political context of the country. This is probably due to women’s or activists’ capacity to adapt to the constantly changing political context. Almaze’s narrative on the way her organization adapts to new political environments illustrates this point. In her narrative, Almaze tells us how they have been obliged to accommodate the new NGO law by suppressing all the courses related to women’s rights. Perhaps radical feminists would have organized and challenged the new law; they would have organized demonstrations/rallies or other activities to have the law changed. The narratives of negotiators show that to a certain point they protested during constitutional debates, and they had petitions signed and dropped them at the Prime Minister’s Office. However, once the law was passed, they complied with it. In other words, while some such as EWLA and NEWA wanted to remain focused on women’s rights issues, registered as local/Ethiopian NGOs, the majority of

women's organizations registered as resident NGOs, working on development/economic issues. It is in this context that Almaze's organization strategized and opted for the status of a resident NGO focusing primarily on the economic and social empowerment of women.

Currently, though, the heyday of women's activism that occurred after the promulgation of the 1994 Constitution seems to have passed, making way for a period of backlash represented by the promulgation of the new NGO law in 2009. The narratives of the women activists in this study illustrate the first period in which women's activism was organized and collective. They give a retrospective view of how vibrant women's organizations were during that period: coming together and taking action to achieve what they considered to be in the interests of women. However, although some understand the political reasons behind the government's promulgation of the NGO law, all but two participants disagree with the assertion of this new law; most of them find it to be an impediment to the advance of women towards equality, as it meant they had to end some of their advocacy or public education programmes due to lack of funds. In a country where women are widely confronted with poverty and violence in their everyday life, they do not expect to be able to raise enough funds to fight the social, economic and political injustices facing women. On the other hand, the two activists that support this law think that Ethiopian women should be able to raise funds: "the pioneers have done a lot with their own money or with what they were able to raise" with EWWA. Here is what one of them has to say:

> I don't understand why they are so upset, they have 30/70. That is 30% in administrative costs, it is a lot … The problem comes from the international community (INGOs). Why should Ethiopians worry about that? When I say let's do advocacy work on violence against women, I don't mean to use the 10% of the international donors. It could be 100% funded by Ethiopians. The thing about advocacy is that the government may have taken it as political advocacy. But if you want to do advocacy, if the agenda is designed within the country, I don't think they have a problem with it.

Hence, although two women[80] out of 19 is a minority, there is a debate on that issue. Nevertheless, for the majority of them this marks a backlash that was just waiting to occur. Moreover, there is another issue central to the debate that is tentatively occurring but which should be pushed further. The question is to what extent donors influence local/Ethiopian NGOs' agendas. Certainly the new law is affecting the way the activists conduct their activities and has had a negative impact on their advocacy work, which is significant in raising people's awareness on a variety of issues related to women, but particularly on the issue of violence committed against women.

The Ethiopian women activists' rejection of the new NGO law does not necessarily mean that they do not resent donor-driven agendas. This is illustrated in one of the negotiators' narratives, in which she declares that "the Ethiopian women's movement died when it became about programmes and projects. Hence, an NGO works when it has funds and therefore projects". This seems to echo what African feminists such as Pereira (2005) have identified as donor-driven programmes that tend to depoliticize, de-radicalize and professionalize gender in the African context. The point is that, again, the activists are conscious of the challenge but, as with their negotiations with government policies and regulations, they adapt their strategies, opting to navigate the donor/receiver relationship by conceiving programmes that are suitable for both parties. Nevertheless, as our activist concedes, that is done in detriment to the Ethiopian women's movement. This seems to indicate that although the interviewees go beyond their assigned roles in their daily activism, they opt to negotiate with or rather adapt their strategies to the political context. The suggestion is that while individually they are radical in their actions, collectively they tend to negotiate to advance their cause progressively. However, it should be mentioned that each and every time, they use all forms of loopholes and possibilities in the new law to continue their struggle. I argue that the capacity of women activists to navigate difficult times, in articulating new forms of struggle, is the landmark of Ethiopian feminists.

[80] I refrained from giving their names for reasons of confidentiality and also to prevent any resentment coming from their peers. One of the women is a former revolutionary activist and the other a negotiator.

Initiatives to avoid direct dependency on donor agencies and government funding were taken earlier. Emebet regrets the discontinuation of the Grassroots Initiative Development Fund. Emebet argues that the initiative, negotiated with foreign donor agencies by the WAO,

> allowed grassroots women's organizations to avoid begging different donor agencies for small-scale financing. It was designed to provide small-scale funding to any women's association presenting a viable project. With this fund, we didn't need to use the government's money.

Indeed, the grassroots fund could have been an alternative for women's associations if it had been combined with a strong autonomous WAO or Women's and children's Affairs Ministry. This is indeed one of the challenges observed in the activists' narratives. Although Emebet's narratives indicate a vigorous WAO during her time, her successors did not seem to have measured the challenges awaiting them. Accordingly, some of the women activists have complained of the inefficiency of what has become the MoWYCA in challenging the system when the government decrees unfavourable policies to women. But also, they regret its inability to assist or support them in their activities. Why don't you interview her?[81] Why don't you ask her? – these were among the requests reiterated by several of the interviewees referring to the minister of the MoWYCA. Needless to say, the general consensus was that the MoWYCA of today was no longer the autonomous women's affairs machinery it was designed to be; as one of the interviewees puts it, "it is not much different from REWA". The implication is that it has finally "become" an instrument of the leading party, because, another interviewee continues, "REWA was a political organization, serving the interest of the Workers Party".

Another reason why women's daily radical action is not translated into vibrant collective action emerges from the narratives. After one of too many

[81] "Her" refers to W/ro Hirut, the minister of what was then called the MoWCYA. As I intended to do anyway, since she was a former member of a revolutionary struggle herself, I managed to obtain her number through a friend of hers, another former member of the movement, and I contacted her and she gave me an appointment on the following Thursday, 27th December 2012, and asked me to call to confirm the time of the interview. On that date, I called to confirm but she said she had to leave for Adama for a meeting and therefore she could not do the interview.

extensively reported violent actions[82] committed against women, prompting an outcry lasting several days or weeks from both women and men, some of the interviewees articulate some form of resignation and/or fatigue. As Lemlem clearly puts it, “after more than 16 years of struggle, I no longer wish to go to these meetings to reiterate the same things over and over again”. Hence, a sense of discouragement and resignation is one factor that affects the way they think and act. Consequently, we can argue that the backlash is not only due to regressive policies, control of the state and/or religious intuitions, but also due to the resilience of patriarchy. This is made visible by some of the interviewees’ arguments that connect the increasing number of violent crimes committed against women, and more specifically the barbaric and inhuman nature of the crimes, to patriarchy. It seems that for some of them the prevalence of violence committed against women is intrinsically connected to the patriarchal structure and an indication of how resilient it is. One of the interviewees specifically raises the issue of domestic violence and argues that

> I think one of the biggest problems that we have and an indication of how very far behind we are is the level of domestic violence against women in Ethiopia. That, to me, is an indication that there is something very deep, still very deep, very sick in this society… In the most advanced societies it’s even worse but they talk about it. In Ethiopia, we don’t want to talk about this; we don’t want to deal with it. We just want highlights, oh, so-and-so did this, look what happened to so-and-so. Thousands of women are suffering so what we need to have is a serious campaign, a national campaign where everybody gets involved, everybody … A campaign doesn’t take more than an organizing committee. You don’t want a structure. The money will flow. Discuss, what is the strategy? How can we approach this to make it a nationwide mobilizing event? With that kind of thinking, and well-organized work, focused on the strategy, a group of 10 people is enough. Then you have something to say. Why should people give you money? So it was a bit of disappointment to me. We don’t know how to do these things and that’s what I was saying to the Setaweets, maybe you shouldn’t involve us. Maybe you young people should dream your own dream...

[82] Some highly mediatized cases on the violence committed against mentioned in some of the narratives are the Kamilat case, then is a similar case of violence committed against an Ethiopian Airline flight attendant a case of an ex-boyfriend who killed his ex girlfriend and her actual boyfriend at Langano resort and the Hana Lalongo’ s gang rape case.

This extract sums up in a way the context in which women activists currently find themselves. After more than a decade of vibrant activism, the movement initiated by EWLA is losing its momentum. The activists are conscious of the unfavourable political environment, and in this extract the interviewee highlights the difficulty they are experiencing with the specific example of violence committed against women. Taking into consideration the prevalence of domestic violence, this interviewee believes that the activists themselves have to question and challenge the way they have previously responded to such actions. She sheds light on their weaknesses and proposes other ways of action focused more on strategies than on structures or external funding. With a serious strategy, she believes, would come people's support and funding. A successful national campaign could not only raise awareness but also bring back the momentum in their favour.

Conversely, she opens a dialogue or a conversation with those she identifies as the next generation of activists, the Setaweet group: those who could become their successors in the typical sense of the term. She appeals to them and urges them to continue the struggle primarily by following their own dreams and advises them to learn from their predecessors' mistakes, building on their experiences rather than following an activism that is running out of steam.

The promise of intersectionality

Finally, an important concept, which emerges from the analysis of the narratives, and is valuable to understand the diverse positioning of Ethiopian women from a feminist perspective, is intersectionality. Many scholars recognize intersectionality as a key concept in feminist studies and beyond. Hence, "intersectionality as a buzzword", 'the intersectional turn", or "intersectionality's (brilliant) career", are words used in the titles of some of the articles that discuss the successful journey of the concept within feminist scholarship (Davis 2008; Carbin &Edenham 2013; Lutz 2014). Yet, Lutz (2014: 8) continues to examine what is intersectionality and questions whether it is " A buzzword? A theory? A concept? A heuristic device? A method.? An analytical tool to for textural analysis? A living practice?" She proposes to use "intersectionality as a methodology and method" to

understand the dynamics of the multiples dimensions of women's oppression on the structural, the individual and power relations levels.

One effective way to go forward which was adopted by the former-revolutionaries and the negotiators, was to address the interconnected effect of the different forms of discriminations. While, in Chapter 7 Alem provides an illustration of the consequences of intersectionality when she describes the conditions to which women in the Manga community in Keffa were confronted to in their everyday life, Dinknesh uses the metaphor of the *Birchuma* (a traditional three-legged stool) to explain the mechanisms of intersectionality. She uses this example to explain the intertwined effects of different forms of subordination suffered by rural women in general.

> Rural women's life is affected by the *combination* of so many things. I always use the example of the "*Birchuma*". If one [leg] is broken you can't sit on it. So you address problems linking face-to-face: ecological problems, economical and/or development needs, social and/ or political issues. …. But the way we can achieve change is not by addressing one single item at a time, but rather addressing all these items and issues that affect women because they [the different forms of discriminations] enforce each other.

Conversely, the narratives of the activists also reveal how a transformation in the way they think and act occurs in the process of change. Their narratives show how each activist becomes aware of the different forms of inequalities such as gender, class/poverty, and/or ethnicity at different times of their activist life. For some it is early in their awareness process that they realize the interconnectedness of the different forms of discriminations experienced by women in their everyday life. While for others it is during their activist journey when they are faced with the different forms of injustice in their own or other women's lives that they understand the dynamics of intersectionality, and how it affects women's everyday experience, both on the individual and structural levels. The analysis of Sehin's story (see chapter 6) illustrates how intersectionality based on class, gender and ethnicity is highlighted in connection with certain experiences in her life.

On the other hand Lemlem' s narratives reveals the workings of intersectionality at the structural level. For Lemlem, the revolutionary activist, the struggle for social justice was the key motivation behind her political

engagement, first within the student movement and later the EPRP. Her narrative shows that although class oppression was given priority by the revolutionary activists, gender emerged as one of the key issues that affect women's everyday lives. Her position of the time was informed by the Marxist explanation/analysis of women's "double oppression", that of class and sex/gender oppression. As Lemlem confirms,

> " as a university student, in addition to your observation and personal experiences, you read and learn about those issues. Then, later on, you learn that there is a Marxist–Leninist theory that explains the double oppression – even triple, quadruple or even more – oppression of women "

If we analyse this sentence, keeping in mind that it is a retelling or reconstruction of her story, we can observe an evolution both in terms of discourse and subjectivity. During the revolutionary period, Lemlem the revolutionary activist's project is explicitly political, aiming to bring about structural changes. However, she adds "even triple, quadruple or even more …" showing in this way that women could face multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. In other words she seems to suggest that in Ethiopia women's oppression was not merely rooted in class or sex/gender oppression but on other forms of oppressions, which might include categories such as ethnicity, disability and age. This is in line with what Yuval- Davis (2006) describes as Crenshaw's (2001) additive intersectionality model in which Crenshaw acknowledges the double, triple and multiple forms of oppressions suffered by marginalized groups, i.e. with additive rather than multidimensional consequences of the different systems of oppression.

Nonetheless, Lemlem's analysis, which fits within the additive model, seems to have evolved overtime, when she describes her activism within EWLA. She highlights the diverse positioning of women, and the different forms of oppressions that it entails. As seen in her narrative, a priori, EWLA's clients came to see her seeking legal aid services, in most cases connected to injustices created by gender inequalities. Moreover, as it has been reiterated with numerous examples, throughout her narrative, their needs for legal aid sometimes have to be put aside momentarily to attend to other more urgent

social needs, such as their health and/ or housing/shelter. This is usually the case for women suffering domestic violence (regardless of social class), victims of fistula and/or rape. Note should be taken that behind these problems lie HTPs that are often at the origin of these crises, creating these specific gender-based crimes that define or are found in a patriarchal system. Thus it is with the confrontation of the intersected effects of different forms of discriminations the women activists' perspective widens and a transformation occurs within them, allowing them to think and act differently. The activists start to see how different categories such as gender, poverty, ethnicity, age or disability, are intertwined and affect women's lives in diverse manners. I suggest that in the process women activists seem to have adopted a more poststructuralist way of thinking that recognizes and addresses "the multiplicity and complexity of axes of oppression" (EJWS, 2009: 207 as quoted in Carbin and Edenheim 2013: 6). The former-revolutionaries' and negotiators' struggles to deconstruct binary oppositions such as urban/ rural, privileged/ poor, formal/ informal etc., as well as their efforts to address or reconcile women's gender basic needs and their gender strategic needs, can be read as the result of poststructuralist understanding of intersectionality which is valuable for the analysis of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society like the Ethiopian society.

Accordingly, as seen in some of the narratives, even if the women activists are structurally organized within what has been identified as development or rights focused associations, their experience shows that in practice they consciously create or develop overlapping programs to deal with the consequences of intersectionality. Almaze's organization is an example, which appeals to this approach/framework, both before and after the new NGO law. In fact, women activists like Almaze, Dinknesh and Ababa have shown how they adapt and appeal to intersectionality to tackle the different forms of subordination that women are faced with today.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the journey of Ethiopian women's activism under three consecutive political regimes and traced the multiple forms of feminist consciousness in the country. Two major assumptions have been made: one is that although women have played key roles, their contributions have yet to be recognized in Ethiopian history. The second is that the form of activism of Ethiopian women is contingent on the political context of the country. Underneath these assumptions there evidently lies the system of patriarchy, structuring all the institutions, both public and private (state, religious institutions, marriage, etc.), and organizing and regulating women's lives.

For the purpose of this study, Weber's (1963) framework of "ideal type" was used as an analytical tool. Thus, the 19 interviewees were categorized into two types, the revolutionaries and the negotiators. As a consequence, I classified 10 as revolutionaries and the remaining nine as negotiators. Moreover, in order to provide historical background to the journeys of both the revolutionaries and the negotiators, I looked at what was recorded on the activism of their predecessors, whom many scholars have referred to as the pioneers. The pioneers consisted of elite women social activists organized in charity-oriented associations during the emperor's period.

Drawing on Dillard's (2000) "endarkened" feminist epistemology, this study attempts to establish a feminist epistemology rooted in the lived experience of Ethiopian women activists. Therefore, it relies on the articulation of the realities known or perceived by the Ethiopian women under study. Similar to Dillard's work, this epistemology is informed by the search for meaning in the life stories, in this case, of 19 Ethiopian women activists. This feminist epistemology raises questions relevant to the lives of the activists and posits their "activism" as being informed by both a sense of "responsibility" to their community, and their recognition of the "wisdom" anchored in Ethiopian women's history of resistance. The uses of the subaltern approach, which offers a conceptual framework that recognizes the agency of marginalized groups, in this case Ethiopian women, has been meaningful in offering a way of documenting subaltern groups' consciousness through their own voices.

One of the issues that emerged from the narratives of both revolutionaries and negotiators is the theme of the undocumented history of Ethiopian women. Some interviewees frequently observe and articulate regret at, to use Shimelis's (2014: 6) expression, the "historiographical 'erasure' or elision of Ethiopian women's revolutionary experience". Moreover, they acknowledge their own contribution to the perpetuation of this practice by their lack of recognition of the pioneers' role, and pledge to remedy this issue by actively advocating the documenting of women's role in Ethiopian society. It is in this frame of mind that some agreed to participate in this research, which clearly stated that their role in the different movements through their own voices would be recorded in the form of life story narratives. Hence, the use of the life story narrative as a method of enquiry has been instrumental to the research, not only as a data-gathering instrument, but also as a mechanism to record both the revolutionaries' and the negotiators' experience of activism. That is consistent not only with the activists' need to reveal and record their story but also with my research project.

The use of the life story approach as an open method of enquiry has contributed to this research as it has allowed me to go beyond the initial scope of the research and to question, for example, whether those categorized by many scholars as pioneers are indeed pioneers in the history of Ethiopian women's resistance to patriarchy or pioneers in their mode of struggle. Having a conversation with and listening to the majority of the interviewees speak about the strength of their mothers, in the process revealing the way their mothers have thought and acted, gave me the opportunity to capture a deeper layer in which Ethiopian women's resistance did not indeed start with the pioneers, but was, rather, located within the history of resistance of Ethiopian women of all times. The "pioneers'" great contribution should not then be read as the beginning of Ethiopian women's resistance to patriarchy but as the opening of new modalities and the shaping of new forms of women's resistance/activism. I believe that drawing on a feminist epistemology rooted in the lived experience of Ethiopian women activists opened a space in which I was able to explore other forms of feminisms, as it "forced me" to take a distant view of what I know, rethink

and re-conceptualize feminism through new perspectives not available in the various established feminist schools of thought in the west. In the process, the evidence of fitting what I found into available typologies of feminism was no longer an answer, nor was observing similarities and differences enough. In my view, Biseswar's (2008) conclusion that educated/intellectual Ethiopian women are not radical in their actions or are not feminist enough to struggle to lift up their sisters is based, not on the reading of Ethiopian women's struggle and realities, but on her attempts to fit Ethiopian women's history of resistance into a limited western feminist perspective.

With regard to the literature review, although my first tendency was to go directly to the literature on women's activism, drawing on some of the general theoretical accounts on collective action allowed me to put Ethiopian social movements within a global context. As some of the revolutionaries have observed, they were activists at a time when there was "the whole movement against the Vietnam War, the movement with Angela Davis and Malcolm X., etc." (Rahel). The evidence of the Ethiopian revolutionary movement as part of global events is also clearly articulated in Martha's manifesto, seen in chapter eight. In this regard, McAdam's (1986) framework of high-risk/cost and low-risk/high-cost activism becomes relevant as it provided a range of scopes that put the student movement and subsequent revolutionary movements in Ethiopia into a global perspective. Moreover, the framework allowed some flexibility as women's activism is not static: not only is it contingent on the historical period in which it occurs but occasionally it also has to adapt to a changing political context within the same historical period. As seen in chapters four to eight, women's activism varies from low-risk/cost at the end of one spectrum to high-risk/cost at the other end. The narratives of the revolutionaries definitely describe high-risk/cost activism since their activism was based on the full-time voluntary engagement of activists who risked prison or even death for their positions and/or actions. On the other hand, the negotiators' narrative makes a distinction. Their activism was embedded in a legal framework, which put it into the category of low-risk activism, but it had a range of levels of commitment. However, the negotiators' activism, which in most cases is in fact their professional work,

or part of it, goes beyond their job descriptions and is inscribed in their biography. As Crossley (2003: 51) writes, “the formation of a radical habitus is closely bound up with an individual’s biography but their biography is, in turn, intertwined with and affected by their social-structural location, as well as broader historical trends and events”.

The narratives of the revolutionaries and negotiators suggest a history of activism anchored in their habitus. The interviewees consistently link their activism to their childhood upbringing. They refer to values upheld in their families as well as practices that contributed to the way they think and act. Values like helping one’s neighbour, sharing and defending the weak emerged from their narrative. Higher education opened up another space in which these values and principles were reinforced in the student movement. Political participation in the student movement was formative as they acquired an ideology apparently consistent with their principles and the structure to support and develop their habitus. Finally, the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution had an accelerating effect in the raising of their consciousness and the acquisition of a more “radical habitus” deployed during the terror years and beyond. The negotiators’ activism (which is also informed by radical habitus) can be read as continuity. The revolutionaries of this study, who were in most cases either among the founders or board members of NGOs working on women’s issues, “transmitted” their mode of action. On the other hand, with regard to the pioneers, Bourdieu’s (1989) concept of habitus was valuable to suggest a history of activism/resistance rooted, as described by the some of the interviewees, in “an Ethiopian way” of life.

This study, which draws on a feminist epistemology, is informed by established feminist schools of thought such as liberal, radical, Marxist feminist theories and other feminisms that include those classified as African American, Third World and postmodern feminist theories. Hence, while some similarities with and differences from pre-existing feminist typologies can be observed, these theories seem to fall short in covering some of the characteristics emerging from the activists’ narratives under study and the long Ethiopian women’s history of resistance to patriarchy. In order to trace feminism and Ethiopian women’s struggle for equality in the different spheres

of the social organization, one has not only to examine the structural institutions oppressing women but also to explore Ethiopian women's activism as expressed in their ongoing everyday resistance to patriarchy. McNay (2004, 2008, 2010), informed by Bourdieu's phenomenological study of social space, proposes disregarding the "abstract level of micro structural analysis and reconceptualiz[ing] notions such as gender and agency as lived relations to make visible the lived realities (experience) of social relations" (2004: 177). In this way, McNay offers concepts such as gender, agency and experience the phenomenological underpinning they lack to be used as analytical categories. Her proposition is applicable to this study as it relies on the narratives of the women activists' lived experience to reveal their agency.

Finally, the review of women's movement literature (Poster 1995; Kuumba 2002; Biglia 2006) was relevant to this study as it provided descriptions of women's movements in other part of the world and placed the Ethiopian women's movement within a global context. It also provided typologies and concepts guiding in the assessment of Ethiopian women's resistance. Literature focused on the African women's movement (Ahikire 2005; Pereira 2005; Prah 2005) was pertinent, particularly in relation to Ethiopian women's movements of the current period, as it tackled the issue of professionalization of gender and thus the "de-radicalization" and "de-politicization" of the feminist agenda. Moser's (1989) and Goetz's (1998) studies, on the other hand, shed light on women politicians' difficulty in effectively participating in policymaking.

The basis of my argument lies in articulating that Ethiopian women activists' participation in collective action observed during periods of crisis is a continuity rather than being a new phenomenon. It has its roots in the collective memory of Ethiopian women's experience of resistance. Those categorized as pioneers attempted to combine the traditional methods of women's resistance to patriarchy with those they imported from their western exposure. Their type of charitable activism through voluntary organizations is most probably the result of syncretism. Their action to improve the status of women in society can be understood as endorsing a feminist agenda.

The suggestion is, thus, that women's resistance is not a recent practice or one totally imported from abroad. Throughout the "country's" long history, Ethiopian women's resistance to patriarchy can be observed through the analysis of women's achievement in terms of their historical influence on state matters (Pankhurst, S. 1957; Prouty 1979) and access to certain rights, such as inheritance and property/land rights as well as access to easy dissolution of marriage and remarriage according to their wishes (Pankhurst, S. 1957; Marein 1957; Crummey 1980; Pankhurst, R. K. 1990; Allehone 2002). All these indicators of women's achievements are often taken for granted as they are ignored in discussions of activism and resistance. As seen in chapter five, Allehone's (2002) discussion on the status of women, marriage and gender relations, particularly in the Fetha Negest, is pertinent, as it highlights the negotiated nature of all the above-mentioned rights. Allehone provides three important factors that explain the influence of customary laws in regulating family life: the disengagement of the Fetha Negest (by extension the limited intervention of the Orthodox Church in private lives), the influences of local rule/custom and indigenous norms on Sharia law, and the distance of the state from different local communities. The implication is that cultural norms have had more influence than religious or state/civil laws in women's private lives in different local communities. Hence, Allehone's argument sheds light on how, to some extent, women in traditional Ethiopia have had certain freedoms that women in other parts of the world have only obtained through struggle. It should be noted that this is not a plebiscite of customary laws in comparison to the more "modern" civil laws. Clearly, inherent in the different customary laws are embedded patriarchal norms and practices that are extremely discriminatory against women, such as HTPs, which have been identified and fought against, particularly by the negotiators.

Previous studies (Pankhurst 1990; Tsahai 1997) have noted that the process of modernization or modern state policies, rather than improving the status of women, have instead reinforced the subordinate position of women. My analysis of the literature review on the pioneers pushes this argument further and suggests that the process of modernization (read: westernization) came

with its own structure based on western patriarchy, which reinforced local patriarchy. In this new, formalized patriarchy, Ethiopian women's negotiated power was reduced. When the pioneers acted and resisted patriarchy in a subtle manner, and articulated and advanced their emancipatory agenda with caution, they were reproducing what they knew, what they had internalized. Their actions were informed by the habitus. As Crossley (2003) argues, the habitus "captures both the embodied-performative aspect of social structures, and the mechanism whereby they are transmitted across generations and through historical times" (Crossley 2003: 3). The implication of this argument in relation to the pioneers' activism is that it provides a framework that describes how a history of resistance is transmitted and reproduced from one generation to another. Knowing that there were influential women in the past is meaningless if it has no impact on our lives. The use of habitus as an analytical tool allows the connection to be made and establishes a reference point to suggest that pioneers' activism is not just the result of imported knowledge or methods – that in fact it derives first from the experiences of resistance of previous generations of Ethiopian women, which are then produced and reproduced through the practice of (new forms) of engagement.

The second result of this research is that feminism or feminist principles are embedded in the Ethiopian women's movement of the last three periods. Each group of activists has been engaged in some form of feminist activity. As seen in chapter five, the concept of feminism was not an issue, since it was not raised or articulated as such. Yet the pioneers promoted an emancipatory project for women based on the equality of women with men. However, their feminism reflected the negotiated nature of their positions. Similar to liberal feminists, pioneers clearly advocated women's equal access to education and employment for those who aspire to it. But their advocacy was nuanced as they avoided questioning the caregiving and housekeeping roles allocated to women, supporting instead women's economic empowerment by establishing handicraft schools such as Princess Tenagne Work's School of Domestic Science for Housewives. The argument, therefore, is that in addition to the liberal values that it carries,

pioneers' feminism is rooted in Ethiopian women's resistance to patriarchy. Again, if we refer back to the narratives of our interviewees and what they say about their mothers' stories, we can observe how their resistance to patriarchy is anchored in the everyday. When Dinknesh's mother sent her daughter to school in secret, pretending that she had sent her daughter to fetch water, this was a form of resistance. When Sehin's adoptive mother and biological mother, instead of returning to their homelands after the Italian occupation, decided to settle instead in another province and live an unconventional life, it was a form of resistance. Women in Ethiopia have resisted patriarchy in their own ways; they have run away from early marriage, abduction and domestic violence. However, their action or agency is not recognized. They are seen as either victims or exceptions. Each interviewee, when she talks about her mother's strength and "wisdom", thinks that her mother is an exception. The suggestion is that the pattern behind this strength or this wisdom is not identified. I argue that what is referred to as "wisdom" in their narratives is what the revolutionaries and the negotiators have not been able to see and is also what has been transmitted from one generation to another. That is why they have failed to recognize that their activism has also been anchored in Ethiopian women's tradition of resistance. On the other hand, the way the pioneers negotiated their feminism is more in sync with conventional practice. The story of how they played with the name of one of their associations indicates their ability to read and understand the society they lived in. Only, the pioneers adopted a "modern" way of doing activism hidden or disguised as charity work.

The revolutionaries continued the trend, yet incorporating another set of imported repertoires of collective action drawing from Marxist analysis of women's oppression (class struggle). When Tesfa and her TPLF peers tried convincing Tigrayan women to support and/or join their organization, they believed that the subsequent mass participation of women in their struggle was based solely on the rural women's allegiance to TPLF's project. Tesfa's story about being asked to bare her chest and show that she was indeed a woman by the Tigrayan peasant women is consistent with this narrative and reinforces the notion that, for the Tigrayan rural women, joining the armed

struggle was indeed new and revolutionary. My argument is that this understanding is only part of the story. It fails to acknowledge that Ethiopian women from different backgrounds have a distinctive previous history of participation as active combatants and/or in supporting activities (Pankhurst 1957; Minale 2002). They do indeed have an established military history, which has allowed them to develop a habitus embedded in their collective memory of struggle. The point is that even the activism of Tesfa and all the revolutionaries should be read as a continuity that is derived in the first place from the habitus embedded in them.

Unlike the pioneers, the revolutionaries were aware of what feminism was, but their conception of feminism was yet again informed by Marxist ideology. Feminism for them was associated with a capitalist and a bourgeois concept and was therefore deemed inappropriate for their struggle. Coming from a Marxist perspective, they considered that they put the "woman question" on the political agenda for the first time. Hence, they pushed for emancipation through collective/radical action. When Tesfa and her TPLF colleagues asked men to fetch firewood on their way home, they were certainly guided by practical assumptions; nevertheless, they were radical in their requests, actions and realizations. The implication is that there is continuity embedded in women's activism to improve women's social, political and economic status. Only the TPLF revolutionaries' feminism differs from that of the pioneers; it is similar to Mikell's (2003: 103) African feminism, which is a "feminism that is political, pragmatic, reflexive and group oriented".

Women in the rest of Ethiopia were also politically organized under the Derg, which established REWA and raised the "woman question". Hence, the mass organization was designed as a political arm of the Derg's structure. Given this, the revolutionary women's agency to act independently was constrained. Nevertheless, REWA, which is said to have had over five million members, was instrumental in raising women's consciousness about some of their fundamental rights as this is professed in Marxist ideology. The Marxist analysis of the period recognized the triple role of women, as wives, mothers and producers (Dereje, 1981). Therefore, revolutionary women were also able to raise practical issues regulating women's public and private

lives. Similar to the pioneers' charitable organizations, revolutionary women's associations at the kebele level provided women with training in various skills and offered affordable childcare facilities.

Another factor that provided the space to maintain continuity is the international context, but particularly the influence of the women's movement abroad. What the pioneers started as a sharing of experiences with women of other African countries expanded as international organizations provided the structural and institutional frameworks WID followed by GAD. That gave the revolutionary women the space to exchange ideas about women's issues without specific reference to feminism and what feminism actually entails. Events such as International Women's Day (IWD), and international women's conferences were all opportunities revolutionary women utilized to have a dialogue with other women. IWD, March 8, was celebrated for the first time during the revolutionary period, Sehin tells us in her narrative, in which she shared two of the 10 resolutions that the committee she was leading proposed. REWA organized a symposium in preparation for the 1985 Nairobi Conference ending the Decade for Women.

The suggestion is that revolutionary women who joined or were recruited by the Derg were not radical in their actions with regard to women's issues. My argument is that although the "woman question" was put on the political agenda, in practice Derg's revolutionary women have had no option but to continue on the pioneers' path, both in the way they think and in the way they act. In other words, they negotiate and adapt their actions according to the political context of the country. Hence, their feminism can be recorded as maintaining continuity with the pioneers' pragmatic form of activism, i.e., a form of activism, in which the revolutionaries were able to make their contribution and articulate women's issues as being political.

The negotiators took the agenda further; they organized into civil society organizations or NGOs such as EWLA, NEWA and WISE, etc., to promote the political, social and economic rights of women. The negotiators are in practice successors to both the pioneers' and revolutionaries' forms of feminist activism. Their activism, which I have classified as low-risk but high-

cost activism, incorporates the diverse causes relevant to women's lives. Yet most of them either categorically reject or avoid being called "feminist". While some still consider feminism to be western, something that has nothing to do with their lives, others choose to eschew the identification due to the term's negative connotations, which impede their "feminist" struggle. It appears that the misconception of the concept, both by some of the activists themselves and by the public, stands as a barrier to negotiators' appropriation of the concept.

One of the conclusions of this research is that, despite the activists' rejection of feminism, their actions are indeed based on feminist principles. Negotiators stand for the equality of women. Thus, some are consequently engaged in the promotion of legal reforms that discriminate against women and have advocated new ones that criminalize HTPs including domestic violence against women. Moreover, they have also successfully participated in the revision of the abortion law that was ratified in 2005. Hence, they have adopted what has been defined as a rights-based approach, which is grounded in the central ideal of the slogan "women's rights are a human rights issue". In this way, they were able to link the social, economic and political rights of women and promote equality. That has in return allowed negotiators observing this approach to raise feminist subjects without referring to feminism. Hence, when challenging the systemic patriarchal order that regulates women's lives, similar to their predecessors', negotiators' pragmatism prevails over ideology.

On the other hand, others choosing a development-oriented approach have made the economic power of women the entry point of their struggle. These could be described as partisans of the GAD approach. Their argument relies on the assumption that economic independence most often produces social and political power. Consequently, they have made economic independence the focus of their struggle and concentrated on providing women with basic training in various skills, which has allowed them to find employment or create their own small businesses. However, their narratives tell us that, recognizing the need for a more comprehensive programme to improve the overall socio-economic conditions of women, they have simultaneously run

overlapping programmes that aimed to raise the awareness of women on gender issues.

Up to the passing of the 2009 Proclamation of Charities and Societies law, negotiators, from both the rights-based and the development-oriented approach, managed to work together by focusing on the common goal of "women's social, economic, and political rights". In fact, their narratives show that they often supported each other and collaborated on prevalent issues affecting groups of women of various backgrounds. The 2001 public protest against domestic violence is an illustration of that collaboration. This EWLA-led campaign would not have been successful without the participation of other women's associations, including the thousands of members of WISE. In fact, this example points out how their collaboration most often converged on issues related to the private sphere, in the process illustrating how the personal is political.

The way negotiators raise issues such as "early marriage, abduction, HTPs and domestic violence", deemed to be "private" matters, is revolutionary. They were able to question these century-old traditions and practices, raise people's consciousness and seize the political opportunity to have discriminatory laws revoked and new ones enacted. Hence, not only did they place these at the centre of their struggle, they made them into a political agenda. This is not only consistent with feminist principles but is also in line with the African feminism seen above. Hence, negotiators' action is political, group oriented, reflective and rooted in the everyday experience of Ethiopian women's resistance.

In the span of the 10 years that followed the promulgation of the 1994 Constitution, various women's associations led by EWLA managed to introduce panoply of legal instruments protecting women. They also conducted awareness-raising or public education campaigns to make sure that men and women knew these laws regulating private lives across urban and rural Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, as seen in chapter eight, the Charities and Societies Proclamation (2009) has constrained negotiators' feminist activism as they

can no longer raise human rights issues unless their NGOs are registered as local/Ethiopian NGOs. That effectively limits the overlapping activities related to women's rights for those who have opted to register their organizations as Ethiopian resident NGOs. That is prejudicial to women in general as their private and public lives are still deeply interconnected.

As expected, that is reflected in the alterations in NGO circles, in which development-oriented NGOs take centre stage and continue their activities, focusing mainly on the socio-economic empowerment of women, and rights-based NGOs are marginalized. NGOs that chose to remain local, including EWLA and NEWA, have certainly managed to maintain some of their activities but they are limited by lack of resources. This represents another backlash against negotiators' feminist engagement. Nevertheless, despite the present difficulties related to the new legal framework, negotiators attempt maintaining the momentum to go forward yet again by modifying their strategies and adapting them to the current political environment.

Moreover, the way forward also seems assured due to the emergence of a new group of young educated women who clearly assume a feminist positioning. The members of this group, who call themselves the Setaweets, appear to meet the challenges head on. I heard about this group for the first time from one of my interviewees, as seen in the revolutionaries' chapter. Then one of my young interviewees, featured in chapter seven, revealed that she has participated in some of the Setaweets' monthly meetings. I did not have the opportunity to go to a meeting of theirs but I have assisted with one of their workshops (mentioned in the chapter on methodology), in which they gave a presentation on what feminism is to an audience of women entrepreneurs, activists and young professionals. The purpose of the workshop was to make sure that at the end of their presentations none of the participants left with any misconceptions of what feminism stands for. The presenters also exposed some of the strategies they use to challenge patriarchal stereotypes that demean women or actions committed against women. Their motto appears to be to intervene whenever they come across discriminatory practices embedded in their everyday activities, both at work and outside it. They are particularly proactive in monitoring and responding

to prejudices diffused through the media. They intervene by either calling or texting radio stations if a programme transmits any information deemed discriminatory to women. Mulatwa's narrative illustrates that the motivation for their activism is not that different from that of many of the negotiators, but the form is changing. Evidently, the use of new technologies has brought about some transformation in the way activists communicate and interact. But most importantly, it has allowed individual activists to participate in collective discussions without necessarily joining a conventional organizing structure. Moreover, it should be noted that it is also part of a global trend. Nevertheless, at a time when the political environment of the country has become less receptive to rights-oriented activism, the use of new technologies has in effect opened up a new space for debate, particularly for new activists such as the Setaweets.

The Setaweets appear to be conscious of the challenges, as they tackle feminist issues meticulously. As seen above, they are aware of the misconceptions around feminism and have begun the awareness-raising process by clarifying the concept and what it stands for. They have also started raising the issue of elitism and what it entails for their movement. Future research could explore how their feminist activism, anchored in the history of resistance of Ethiopian women, provides these "successors" with the opportunity to articulate a renewed form of feminist agenda in Ethiopia.

Finally, my argument is that feminist engagements in Ethiopia, and perhaps throughout the Global South, present some particularities linked to their historical/cultural context, which are often ignored by feminists in other parts of the world. Their activism/feminism is often not recognized as such and/or is taken for granted. Tripp and Bardi (2017)[83] concur with this view in their recent book, which challenges the "assumption that African women activists have simply absorbed external agendas and definitions of Feminism and shows how instead they have creatively and actively forged their movement with reference to their own concerns as they have defined and conceptualized them (p.1).

[83] The book was published in 2017 after the submission of the thesis in December 2016. This is an addition made after the defense of the thesis in March 2017.

The specificity of the Ethiopian women's history of resistance is particularly relevant in rethinking the path of feminisms in the Global South. In effect, Ethiopian women present a long history of resistance to patriarchy, as we have been able to record. Feminism in Ethiopia and women's struggle for equality did not emerge only lately, as is conventionally presented, but are inscribed in the county's history. There is much evidence of women's activism and history of resistance, chiefly if one takes a research angle that focuses on the experiences and realities as described by the researched population, in this case the women activists.

Therefore, this research attempts to fill a gap in the study of Ethiopian feminism and Ethiopian women's conception and practice of feminist principles. The examination of Ethiopian women's activism and feminism, as a 'way of looking' enhances our understanding of the roles of women not only in the Ethiopian society, but also potentially more generally in the African context and beyond. This contribution can support emerging new approaches to feminism and in doing so contributes to the development of a knowledge base about feminism from Southern perspective. Moreover, it opens the space for alternative understandings or explanations of women's political participation and/or social movements in general and revolutionary movement in particular.

Future research could contribute to re-thinking some concepts previously taken for granted, for example the question of the resilience of patriarchy and women's roles in such resilience

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Appendix A

Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Peace Studies and International Development, University of Bradford

Informed Consent Form in the Research entitled

Life story narratives of Ethiopian women activists
The journey to feminist activism

Researcher: Tigest K. ABYE
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Introduction:

This research study is designed to understand the nature of women's activism through the life stories of Ethiopian women activists. Its aim is to increase the knowledge base on Ethiopian women's agency by exploring how they became involved in political or social movements, the role they have played and still play, and the outcome that their experiences have had in their lives. My assumption is that although they played key roles, their contributions have yet to be recognized in Ethiopian history.

1. Interviews will take approximately 90 minutes, and are done preferably in two sessions in a setting of your choice. Between 13 and 15 people will participate in the study.

2. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to talk about your life, and particularly relevant experiences that led you to your present position of an agent of change. I will also ask you to describe pivotal moments, your feelings, impressions, as well as stories, which you think illustrate your experiences. I would also want to know the meaning you attach to your experiences.

3. The interviews will be audio or digitally recorded and later transcribed. If you wish you can ask for the use of false names and change of any identifying information during and after the recordings. The recorded tapes will be destroyed after 10 years.

4. The data will be kept confidential and kept separately from any identifying information, which will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Access to data in the computer will be protected by the use of a password. Reports or publications will not identify the participants.

5. Although I anticipate them to be minimal, there are potential risks in this research. Therefore, if you feel uncomfortable, you are free to decline answering any particular question or stop the interview.

6. Women participating in this project will not be remunerated financially or in any other form. However, some participants may get personal satisfaction by anticipating that their stories may inspire and contribute to the empowerment of young women.

If you have questions after the interview, please feel free to contact me. If you have questions and concerns about the project that you wish to discuss, you can contact the institutions …… at ……

If you agree to participate please sign below two copies, one of which will be given to you.

Name **Date**

Signature of participant **Signature of person obtaining consent**

Appendix B

Narratives of the revolutionaries

Sehin

"Street harassment" (lekefa)

I think in my case it has always been about rights/justice. Before, it was the lack of rights. You know where I lived in Addis, right, it was close to the OAU,[84] you see nice cars. At that time, young girls could be harassed by anyone, from the shoe-shine boy to the guy in the nice car. I didn't understand all this. Where I grew up I would never have gone through a similar experience. It was a strange experience for me. Then, as a 10th grade student I wrote this essay. At that point I didn't understand abstract ideas, I was more a pragmatic person. So the essay I wrote, entitled "*Lemin yihone*?" ("Why is that so?"), was based on my real-life experience. I discussed the issue of street harassment with which young girls or women were confronted in those days. When you walked on the street, a car might stop, you continued on your way, it would stop again, and it was a real hassle. Thank God, the way I dress, my shoes, all these were not an issue for me. Actually, I think I knew that could have been an issue when I arrived in Addis. I knew that, although my appearance and the way I spoke couldn't be a problem, I was aware that the dresses I had then, the worn-out dresses brought from Welega because I had no money for replacements, would be a problem. Therefore, I had to ask myself, what do you want in life? I wanted to get the best, which I could only get through education. Should I focus on what I look like now? No. Here in Addis Ababa, I went to school barefoot for six months when I was attending Beyene Merid High School. I did not dress particularly well. Do I look sexy? Am I appealing? I could not stop asking all these questions. But I didn't think so, especially during those years.

Particularly as a newcomer, it was even weirder for me as I felt that I did not fit into this "Addis Ababian" thing yet … I had my own questions about our society. I had observed *ababa* (title given to one's father or to an older person, in this case she refers to her grand-uncle) and had my own opinion, although later on I did realize I was wrong. At the time, the employment situation was not great, even when you were a holder of a first degree. Like now, where an MA holder has difficulty getting employment. I knew that *ababa* never had a formal degree, and he was a judge, while those students with degrees were unemployed. That was immature, but it was one of my questions. But later on I learned he had the equivalent of a PhD in the Ethiopian

[84] She and I knew each other. Prior to the interview, we exchanged greetings and spoke about our respective families, and then she asked me if I had a brother of a particular name who looked like me and who lived around Organization of African Unity (OAU), at the time – African Union (AU) now. Of course, it was the same person. The relevance of this is that my brother later confirmed that Sehin was an important cadre and very active in the organization of women.

school system. He had written a important book about the life story of Tewane Betsde in the form of *keneî* when he was attending the traditional school. That was more or less like a PhD dissertation. I think this is how my consciousness started to develop. I started articulating things. Moreover, I was in high school when the student movement reached its climax. You see, I don't have a dormant personality; I am naturally an active person.

The student movement

So when some kind of movement occurred in our school, I was curious and asked questions. Then one day there was a small programme, and people holding speeches on a small stage at Asfaw Wessen, now renamed Misrak Atekalay High School, where I was a 10th grade student. I looked around and noticed there was no woman among the speakers. Then, I don't know how it happened, but I somehow found myself on the stage. I was just representing, without me knowing I was actually representing women. I think I felt like, why not girls? I don't know what I said then, finally I found myself in the student council. At that time only a few understood what was happening, most of us didn't have a grasp of what was happening. I think that is why the movement was not successful in the end. Because we had neither the experience, the knowledge nor the practice, I can say that we were fuelled by passion. You have to know that, at that time, the impact of high schools in the student movement was fairly limited, and that may be because of the high school I was in. Then the school closed for the summer.

Edget Behebret Zemecha (national Development Through Cooperation campaign)

The following year we had the *Edget Behebret Zemecha*. Fortunately or unfortunately, I was assigned to Sekota, but it was closed. All our high school students were assigned to the north regions. I think it was closed for infrastructure and security reasons. In between all this I become pregnant and I had my first child. I had to look after my baby. However, in order to be accepted back into school, I had to certify that I couldn't go to the *Zemecha* for family reasons …

Processes of politicisation

Even before I joined university, back in high school a couple of guys from my neighbourhood (Belay's sons, Fisseha and so on) had approached me and asked me to join their movement. But for me I had my daughter to think about first, I knew what my priorities were. At that time, my friends, who were more or less involved in EPRP, were advising me to change schools. They were afraid to tell me what was happening and what was going on.

Other guys, Tesfay Gebre Tsion, and Kiflé sons, had also approached me. Two concepts were raised at the time; today I know their meaning well. The first concept *is "sebeawinet*" [humanity] and the second is "*Ethiopiawinet*" [Ethiopian patriotism]. At the time, people were being killed. I didn't like that. Why do we have to kill people while fighting for

the dignity of man? My position remains the same today. Okay, if they [EPRP] had to kill people, they should not have started with the kebele revolutionary guards – they should have gone higher and eliminate the leaders if they had to kill at all. Because of this position, I couldn't stay with my family, I was ostracized. When I went into a room, they would leave. So I had to bring my daughter wherever I went.

Then there was this young journalist called Yeshewalem Mengistu, she was usually dressed in khaki. She was from Harar. She was like a role model to me I really liked her. One day she was killed in broad daylight. I was at her house when her family was informed about her murder, and even her relatives were stunned by my reaction when I heard the news. While I was really sad and grieving, I knew that a lot of people around me were happy. Yeshewalem Mengistu was the chairperson of kebele 01 and was with the Derg, while all my family were more or less sympathizers or members of EPRP.[85]

One day at school, people of my class and those of the same grade were called one by one. I asked the girl sitting beside me, Yemesserach, what was going on; she said, you will find out soon enough. My name was called a few seconds later. All those whose names were called were supposedly considered as *banda*[86] [traitors]. If you asked me who did this, I am sure it was Tesfay and his group. That was because on one of our walks I had asked them why innocent people had been killed, and why did they think Eritrea should be independent. Anyway, it was a rainy day; they left for their parade without causing any harm, and I got home safely. I stopped attending class …

After everybody came back from the campaign, I rejoined high school. The school had arranged for a fast-track system, so I was allowed to follow the programme and to sit for the national exam. I passed and was accepted to join the pre-med programme at Addis Ababa University … At the Christmas break, I found out that some members of my family and my friend had been jailed, despite their participation in kebele activities. I went to the kebele and joined some of the young people who were involved in the kebele 08 structures and activities. One day, someone told me that somebody wanted to talk to me outside. When I went out, there was this *kumbi* (family-sized) Volkswagen waiting for me. They violently pushed me in the car, hit me and put me in jail.

The thing is, just because I was from Welega, they assumed I was with Meison. I spoke Oromigna [the Oromo language], I spoke this language with passion. For example, if I were with an Oromo I would

[85] Sehin does not say outright that she was more of a Derg sympathizer; rather, she illustrates her position through the story of her idol's death. In order to do so she seems to go forward through time after her high school days, disrupting the chronological order of her narrative.

[86] This word was applied to Ethiopians who collaborated with the Italian colonizing forces during the five-year occupation.

naturally speak in Oromigna. I grew up in that culture, I even call myself Oromo, if that matters at all. Because all my socialization occurred in Welega, and I even have a spot in mind if my husband would agree to move back. You don't know how it happens but that is what it is.

And most of the [Meison] members, if not all, were from Oromo. So for them it was a given, I am Oromo therefore I am a member of Meison. When they hit me the first night I did not know what to tell them. I really didn't know how to lie. The old woman [her adoptive mother] used to lie a lot; she used to make up stories to cover her lies. Her stories had a grain of truth, but she used to lie consistently. So I grew up hating her lies; therefore, I couldn't just bluntly say, comrade I am like you. On the second night, I had a conversation with my God: "I don't want to die, if you just get me out of this one, I will make a cause, or rather I will die for a cause". Because it was a time when people died for their causes.

I think God heard my prayers, when I told my entire story to Mulugeta, the cadre. Of course, I was active when I was in high school before the *Zemecha.* But I didn't go to the *Zemecha* while my friends had become radicalized; my focus had moved to taking care of my daughter.

After that, a direct order was given instructing them not to torture me. While I was in prison, there were consciousness-raising sessions. One of the people who came to teach us was W/ro Tiruwork Wakeyo. The topic was women and the Revolution. You have to keep in mind my promise to God. And I had to survive but, in addition, deep down, I had my own cause and my own stand or position in life. I was grateful to God for letting me become what I am now.

When you are confronted with a challenge that threatens your life, when a person with a gun to your head tells you that he will do an L and M on you [Leninism and Marxism] you don't need to understand what it means, let alone the torture you have already gone through. I don't want to even go there – you just concede. So I joined in the activities, it is my personality, I had to get involved. I guess it was difficult for me to remain unnoticed. That is how I was and am. "Why do I wait for people to act for me, why don't I do it myself?" This has always been the motto of my political life.

It was then that Tiruwork showed up. She was beautiful, very eloquent, could really make a public speech. So I said to myself, I wish I could be like her.

I was released from jail just a few weeks before the end of the second semester. I went to see the dean of the natural science department, an English guy named Marshall, at the Arate Kilo campus. There was also another girl who had had a mental problem, and had missed school like me. He told me that it would be difficult to go to medical school because of my absence and my first-semester results. So he

gave me two options: either go to the pharmacy department or go to Alem Maya University in Harar. However, while I took the third choice, which was to withdraw, the other girl chose Alem Maya University.

I told you about my admiration for Tiruwork; with my personality and my background, socialism appealed to me. I understood the class issue easily, because all I had to do was observe the family in which I lived. That allowed me to observe things with a different lens. And this has something to do with my background. It had something to do with my adolescence, my formative years, without me realizing it. Then Tiruwork started following my progress. Meanwhile, I was living with the friend who used to take care of my child. As I told you before, I could not be inactive so I was spending my days participating in the kebele activities. I thought that would occupy me until I got the job that I applied for with Ethiopian Airlines. You know Martha, your neighbour, she and I were appointed to be part of the social committee, in charge of the literacy programme [*messeret timhirt*] run by the kebele. Even though it was brief, we had a good time together; as a French student, she used to think in French, so whatever idea she came up with I used to write it in proper Amharic. She used to work at the Tourism Commission – after work, she would pick me up to go to the kebele together. It was great doing it with her because she was full of life, like most of the French school students.

Recruitment as a Derg cadre

One day I was at home, I was told, someone wants to see you. I went out and when I saw that car again [*kumbi* Volkswagen] I almost fainted, I thought I was going to jail again. They told me to report to the Arate Kilo *shengo* [parliament]. I was so in shock that I couldn't remember where it was. Mind you, it wasn't only that *ababa* used to work there, it was close to the university I went to.

I had to do it because it was the leader cadre who came to tell me personally, without telling me what it was about. You know that there was no questioning authority at the time; you had to do what you had to do. Besides, I was not necessarily unhappy about it. At that time I didn't know the nitty-gritty details of what it entailed.

When I reported at the *shengo* the next day, I was told "from now on you are a cadre". I was there with Mulumebeth, another woman, who used to be an active member of EPRP and who was even imprisoned for a while. Instead of her, though, they told me that I would be the secretary of the women's committee. Then I was given the same office where *ababa* used to work, which I had to share with other two people. I was so impressed that I was afraid to touch anything.

I became a cadre, to be near Tiruwork. I was so proud of myself. I didn't discuss this with my partner; by then we were living together. It was not something you discussed. I was not ready to sacrifice my life; I had my baby to look after. No way. There is this saying, "*lige*

kewlede hamotu fessesse" [once you give birth to a child, you become cautious] – it is true.

To be honest with you, I was not unhappy with what was happening to me. Tiruwork was also present. I didn't know the details at the time but there were five political organizations, I don't even remember in which one of those I was. By that time she was just advising. I really have respect for her. Even if now sometimes it is distorted, it was then that 8th March, International Women's Day, was celebrated for the first time in Ethiopia. I can tell you that I was the secretary of the organizing committee. We organized by calling upon the contributions of different professions, which included lawyers, social workers, journalists, etc. … And we made something big. It was one of the things I can proudly say I was involved in organizing. At the end of the day we had to announce the resolutions of the event. There were 10 resolutions. I can vividly remember two of the fundamental ones. I was the one assigned to read those resolutions. I think I was also taken to the TV studio.

Among the two resolution points I remember, the first one was *atdebdebun* [don't beat us], the second one was with regard to retirement rights. Our husbands should be beneficiaries. The first one you can take it literally, it was crystal clear. The second one I think the journalists group [*ene Nigat*] came up with. But as it was political the decision was ours. The retirement law enacted then was based on the assumption that men are the providers; therefore, if my husband passes away, I as his wife am entitled to 50% of his allowance. Meanwhile, women had joined the workforce and there was no law reform. Therefore, when a female employee passed away the husband was not entitled to the same benefit.

That was a gender issue. While the first one was a specifically female issue, as it is about harassment or violence against women, the second one is about women's rights for their spouse to be entitled to the same benefit. It was not only economic but also political.

After that episode, my family and friends were making fun of me by mimicking me saying "don't beat us". Then this thing got into me; the more I participated in different committees, the more I became vocal and articulate. I honestly don't know how. It grows into you; as they say, you learn by doing. We had no training, but one constant reality, basically that is your life ["*nurosh new*"].

I don't think I am unique, I just had passion for what I do. The passion comes not because I am particularly good; it is because I lived it. It is my life, and as a woman you had to face different type of challenges. I think that was why I was labelled or categorized as feminist.

About being a feminist

When I look deep into me, of course in practice I am [a feminist]. But if you have to have a category of feminist activism, it is feminism that has emanated from socialist theories and the Revolution, where we

were involved in raising awareness on what was then called “the woman question”. For sayings like “*set be setnetwa tikeber*” [respect for women as women], now I would rather say “*set besewnetwa tikeber*” [respect for women’s rights as human rights]. I eloquently spoke for it, and stood by it. If you say women it has some kind of reductionist connotation.

Anyway, all these things contributed to the growth of my political views. I worked within the Derg institutions until 1976 [1983 Gregorian calendar]. I still felt like the odd one out. I agreed with the philosophy but not with the implementation methods. I even started to depart from this, because I understood, and had seen closely what it was and how it evolved. I knew that to live I did not need to be a cadre. I have always thought that I had the responsibility to go forward and debate and act on issues that I firmly believe on. In addition, I could have love or respect for you but if I didn’t agree with you, I could say no and firmly stand my ground.

Lemlem

The process of coming to awareness

I can situate myself as coming from a middle-income family background. That does not mean I grew up separated from the community. In fact, I grew up within and with close interaction with the neighbourhood community [*seffer*]. From as early as I can remember, I did not like seeing injustice committed in my neighbourhood. For example, if I happened to see some kind of injustice occurring at elementary school I used to either tell a teacher or if I thought I could settle it myself I would do so. That is what I recall now.

I don’t believe that people become consciously activist spontaneously. One becomes an activist over time or can be led to become one when triggered or incited by a specific incident. In my case, I believe that the way our parents brought us up contributed to who I am today. The way we followed our parents when they went to church, where children could hear about “being good”. For example, if you see an elderly person needing help on the street, you just go and help out the elderly person with carrying heavy stuff, saying hello, getting their blessings, etc. … I can say that this could be identified as the Ethiopian way [“our way”] of good education or good upbringing.

Then come the high school years. I went into ninth grade in the 1960s [Ethiopian calendar]. Lots of events were occurring and political activism was fired up. Some students brought and read us some pamphlets that raised our awareness about the general situation of the country and issues like “land to the tiller”, telling us the hardship of the peasant; however, there was nothing about the woman issue at the time. Not that we were active then, but rather, because of the political context of the time, in which people’s political consciousness was high and you can say that when we arrived at university we were already indoctrinated, therefore once we were enrolled in the

university we became real revolutionaries within the student movement. I was so often in and out of university that I sometimes wonder whether I can class that as getting a proper university education. All that, because we were convinced of people's oppression, as well as the inevitability of social transformation. The momentum for social change was crystal clear for us.

Looking back, you can say that the way we proceeded may not have been right but we wanted to bring about social change. The consciousness-raising process started in high school through our reading and discussion on issues concerning our country. We also read Greenfield on the aborted coup of Mengistu Neway [1960]. And as we enrolled at university, we were presented with magazines such as *Challenge* and *Struggle* that continued the consciousness-raising process with the various oppressions endured by the majority of the Ethiopians. Thus began the cycle of student demands, demonstrations, repressions and imprisonment, and back on the street, demonstrating, repression and imprisonment. It took me 10 years to finish my studies at the university.

Gender issues

While the last of my high school years and the university years were marked by mobilization for social transformation in general, it is at the university, during the period filled with high public protest, that I became aware of women's issues. In this environment, where both male and female students profess and engage in bringing about social change, some of the same male students active in the movement who proclaimed land to the tiller, bread for the hungry, treated female students as less than their equal partners. Long before life as a member of EPRP, right when you set foot in the campus you could sense the different treatment endured by female students. Female students' life at the campus was hard. Even those male students who were thought to be more enlightened than others criticized the way you dressed, walked and ate. Everything we did was scrutinized and criticized. I am sure that there might be a lot of female students who abandoned their studies because of this harassment. That is when I first realized that there was a problem with the way female students and women in general were treated in Ethiopian society. If those educated female students who succeeded in entering university were hassled and treated this way by their male friends, or even more surprisingly by their companions of struggle, how were those less privileged and less educated women treated and handled or dealt with by society? This question started to go round and round in my mind. These incidents made me realize and think about the conditions of women in general and the specificities of their issues.

While during the high school years the consciousness-raising process focused on the general situation of the country, it is only when I was a university student that that I became aware of the conditions of women. First through your own observations and then by experiencing all those stupid injustices which female students were subjected to

and obliged to face in their everyday lives. When you have to deal with all these stupid criticisms about the way you dress, eat and walk, you start to wonder whether maybe another struggle is also needed. Moreover, as a university student, in addition to your observation and personal experiences, you read and learn about those issues. Then, later on, you learn that there is a Marxist–Leninist theory that explains the double oppression – even triple, quadruple or even more – of women.

Something you need to realize is that there were two struggles. The first one was with your own friends. Let me give you an example – at that time if one of your struggle comrades asks you out for a date and you refuse to go out with him, you are automatically labelled and treated as a person with bourgeois behaviour. And no one will think or believe that you refused because the person simply has stinking breath or you just did not like him. I tell you that you would not like to be in that situation – the general sentiment is, who is she to refuse him? On the other hand, when a female student occupied a leadership position within the structure of the organization or the party, because of her merit – that is, hard work – there were a lot of people who would not accept it.

Political engagement during the Derg

However, as the time was conducive to the engagement of the youth with one of the organizations, be it Meison or EPRP, you somehow ended up engaged in one of those organizations. And that led me to be imprisoned three times in my life. The first time was on a weekend visit to a sick friend in Holeta who was participating in the *Zemecha* My visit was supposedly associated with a consciousness-raising campaign for one of the opposition parties. Just on that suspicion alone I was thrown in jail for 33 days. There they shaved my hair off and I had to do "sport".[87]

As I said above, during the Derg period I was incarcerated three times. The first time was Holeta; the second was after a protest gathering within the university compound. So I was taken to the first police station and put in jail for a short period. Before you were released from jail, they took your picture and made you sign some papers. They expected, as did your parents and relatives, that this would calm you down. The assumption was that you had learned your lesson and therefore you would abstain from future participation. Actually, it had the opposite effect as you came out upset and more determined than ever to continue your struggle.

Finally, I was caught for the third time – the cadre pulled out my file and showed me my signature. Actually, they came to get me from my house. At that time going to jail was not exceptional for university

[87] What she described as sport, with irony in her voice, was the tough military camp routine that was designed to teach these young revolutionaries a lesson so that they would reconsider before getting themselves in trouble again.

students like us. In those days, younger students, even children, were imprisoned, hit and even tortured. That's another story by itself and I don't want to get into it.

The third incarceration, at the Derg "*tsehifet bet*" [headquarters] and later at *Maekelawi* [one of the Derg's improvised prisons], lasted a year and nine months. Even though I personally think that compared to others mine was short, it was a tough and unforgettable experience for me. What made this time difficult is that I was beaten a lot. [She shows me her hands.] More than 30 years later, as well as the visible physical scars on my hands and legs, the psychological scars remain. Again, I don't want to get into this. That's when I went back to university to finish my studies, because it did not make any sense to abandon that as well. The reason I went back to these moments is to show you the link with the sense of responsibility to social justice that was instilled in me when I was a child. We were educated, middle-class students; we could have finished our studies and started our own lives. By that time my father had passed away and my mother could have used my support and contribution. Nonetheless, you say to yourself, no, we are fighting for a bigger purpose, she [her mother] could also benefit from the social transformation for which we were struggling.

You see, things were open to us, we could work or travel abroad to continue our studies but we chose to struggle and bring about social salvation for the oppressed, opting for collective salvation rather than individual gratification or success.

But that did not occur, we did not succeed; yes, you were jailed and then released – so what? You just had to do what you had to do, and thus finish what you have started. Then you start asking yourself what your next step is. Something social? By that time the question of women's oppression – especially what was going on behind closed doors in the home, the violence that you observe, etc. – was creeping into my mind. That is how I started thinking, why don't we work to improve the conditions of women, and that's what working for EWLA allowed me to do.

After putting all your efforts and your youth into achieving something and failing, you have to start picking up some of the pieces and move on. When you think about how you want to continue your journey, you see that there were a lot of opportunities. But in the long run, working for EWLA became obvious. At least it was legal. In other words, we could exercise our profession and work for the improvement of women's lives legally. Not only did you get to work on issues that were close to your heart and important to you, within a legal framework, in the process you become a role model for others. Helping out a single woman gives you a lot of satisfaction. That is how EWLA was founded in 1995.

At this point, she starts to explain how she became one of the founders of EWLA and talks about her activism in this woman-centred professional organization for about an hour. Hence, the following section comes after I intervened and redirected the focus back to the revolutionary period and her role in it. However, as could be observed in the following section, the use of the pronoun “we” becomes prevalent, illustrating the collective nature of the movement.

Defining revolutionary activism

> You can never forget that time; it is always hidden beneath the surface. Sometimes you go somewhere, and some incident prompts you to remember and talk about what an inmate did or said. Besides, there are many of us spread all over the world; some of us still keep in touch. That experience has created a real bond between us; we can even understand our silences. … In addition, you can never forget such difficult times. You cannot say it was a short period; it was a long and very difficult period.
>
> The main difference between the activism then and the activism of the current period is that today you can do it legally. You just have to register and put your certificate on the wall, and you can go about your business within a legal framework. By contrast, during those Derg days, you were up against the totalitarian military regime. As such, the risk was high and the work was dangerous.
>
> The difference is that then you were an outlaw. You were assuming that the military government was illegal, you were advocating, organizing and actively working towards the establishment of a civilian government. Hence, you were organized in a party structure, within which you had a youth league and women’s league workers branch, etc. … of course the party was the most important body of the organization.

Recruitment and indoctrination process

> At that time we were not working. Even when you were recruited and you had been checked, the person who recommended and recruited you had to know you. There might be a few people who became members of the party directly. But you usually had to go through the youth league and be very active in it for a few months before you became a party member.
>
> We were not only reading *Democracia* as others would like you to believe. You had to read about Marxism and Leninism, of course, but we also read works of Carlos Mariátegui on armed struggle in Peru. We were told to raise our own consciousness so we read a lot. Of course, the question is whether what has been done in these

countries would work in our context. I don't think that question has been raised or even been analysed properly.

Then you discussed your readings with your cell members; only the leader of the cell knew and had contact with the structure above her cell. That was to avoid putting your comrades at risk if you were caught. The challenge then was finding a place to meet, or later to spend the night, particularly for women – that is, the guys could sleep in anywhere, they could even sleep at *chat bet* (a place where people go to chew chat). They certainly couldn't take you there …

Revolutionary struggle/activism

In addition to your readings, and discussion with your cell members, you could be asked to do duplications of reading materials with *adefris*, [a duplication material]. Or, you could be asked to write an article for a newsletter. After that, the following action was distributing the tracts, or leaflets that were prepared. That was dangerous because there were random searches on the streets, and if you had any incriminating material in your possession you would go straight to jail. And god knows what awaited you there. During the night, we used to write revolutionary slogans in red on walls. Sometimes you had red marks on your face. Or you have to put banners on light poles across the streets where revolutionary guards could catch you, put you in prison or worse shoot you right there.

In addition, when the armed struggle started we had to raise funds, by stealing anything of value from our houses because most of us were students and did not have an income. At that time stealing was not immoral. The funny thing was that most of us wanted to participate in the armed struggle and even went jogging early in the mornings in order to prepare for it. The idealism that was our driving force, the promise to bring change, to give power to the people and land to the tiller.

Looking back, it is easy to make the criticism that we went into the urban armed struggle without getting the proper training and organization. But you have to take the context we were in; I have had long discussions about this with my son. He said you guys were crazy, getting yourself beaten for claiming land to the tiller. My son could not understand how we could get through torture for mere ideals that promised bread to the hungry, land to the tiller etc.… he could not apprehend the fact I could get myself tortured to the point I have such a big scar on my leg and some deformation of my hand. It is very hard for him to imagine, in a way I understand his astonishment.

However, you have to understand that everything was real for us and we were ready to die for our cause. Whenever we left our houses, we were convinced that we might not come back. But, we believed in the motto that claims, the death of a person is nothing compared to the gains of a thousand. So we were not afraid to die, nothing could make you that way except for the power of the idealism.

Gender and/or women's activism

I had a leadership position in the women's committee; our role was to organize women for our cause. We talked about women's issues; about the double, triple oppression of women, but our priority was crystal clear – working for the party.

What makes me sad in all this, even now, we always put women at the forefront everywhere, whether you go to church, where you are asked to give more than you can get, where you are always seen as inferior to men, and so close to the devil. Women, fundraising for the building of new churches or bringing food, do everything in the church, starting with the cleaning. Similarly, during that time women were ready to join and participate in the struggle, and all you needed to do was organize them. Including mothers and older women, they were organized in the ritual "*uuta* committees" at night. Even they were sent to jail, and were made to walk on their knees on stoned roads.

The Derg used women too. For example, during the Derg period, women were the first to be called upon to contribute to the war effort, and more specifically to give their time and energy to prepare and provide the food supply for the army. Therefore, their kebele organized them, expecting at least one person per household to do activities such as fundraising, grinding grain, cooking and promoting the military of the Ethiopian army. I remember that my sister was the one representing our family, not my mum. You went along saying you wanted to help. It was on this kind of occasion, if you managed to relate to some of them, you could recruit, you raised their awareness and organized them. The same goes for the Derg, they succeeded in raising their awareness because they controlled the food rationing system.

Anyway, the time was for idealism. No fear of death, taking risks was part of the game because you could be arrested anytime, day or night. When recruiting new people we used codes to identify each other, and in that way some were apprehended and beaten. Some were very creative and courageous – when people came to search their houses, for example, they would throw something on their head and act like they were the maid of the household. There were a lot of young women who improvised, in this way escaping being taken to prison. In fact, you had to be creative to confound the Derg security and go out disguised in different outfits, it could as a beggar, office worker, maid, or as a mother.

Male chauvinism

Within the party I guess there were few women who were in or close to leadership positions. What I know for sure is that efforts were made to recruit a lot of women but I know that the message or the goal was that only once the socialist revolution was achieved would the issue of women eventually be resolved. However, even within the leadership of the party, there were some who just could not see women beyond their supporting role, as less than their equals. Consequently, the fact

that we did not have respect for each other within the party made it harder to expect that the equality of men and women would be attained once the socialist revolution was achieved**.**

Not only was the structure of the party conducive to women and youth organizing, there were a lot of talented women who had writing skills. I don't know where all their writing has disappeared to, but there was a lot of it, most particularly revolutionary poems written by women.

The other challenge came from your family. There was high pressure from your family to stop what you were doing. My mum threw me out of the house for a week because she saw me participating in a demonstration against something in our neighbourhood. When I got back from the demonstration, she told me, "I want no trouble – I want to take care of my younger children. Leave my house".

Of course, I said I would because we had this discourse on "the need to break from family ties" to become revolutionaries. Of course my mum did not really believe I would do it. Anyway, I ended up going to one of our relatives' house. I can tell you, for example, this 16-year-old girl executed in front of her mum after being designated [*metekom*]. To hide, you have to leave your neighbourhood. So she came back, she was shot dead in broad daylight. She died screaming "If you think that killing me will change of the course of the Revolution…!" She was very courageous. Her mum went a bit crazy, but that did not save her from being put into prison herself. You know, when we were in *Maekelawi*, if they called your name in the evening you knew you were going to die. When you saw those whose name had been called get up and leave, you would say they were going to get a prize, a trophy. And every 24th Tahissas [December] I stop and remember three young women who were called one Thursday night, were killed the following Monday at the Derg *tshifet bet.* One time, I said to one of my inmates who had just been called, I said Wubit, put on a sweater with long sleeves, she looked at me, turned and left without changing, she knew that she was not coming back and that she was going to die. I still remember the courage in her eyes when she looked at me, not a lot of people would face death with such courage and determination.

The sad thing is, after all these sacrifices, particularly in terms of lost lives, prison and torture, we did not succeed; therefore, we must have done something that was not right to have come to such failure. But that does not mean that we should regret our actions – it was our age, it was the time. Of course, some died, some went abroad, and others went back to school. So when I hear some people say, if you have done this instead of that, I get a little bit irritated. Because first, what's done is done. And I tell them, I am sure that those of you who did not participate, while others were out and involved, you were scared. Criticizing what went wrong – I could do that as well, but not participating then was like swimming against the tide.

I can admire those who did not participate because they sincerely believed what we did was wrong. But I would call that generation “the generation”, whatever their mistakes. You would question more those who were not involved or did not participate in the movements. One time, my younger sister and her two friends were arrested on the street and the cadre who arrested them asked them, where are you going? They responded that they were going to look for a job. He said, are you telling me that you are not from EPRP or Meison? They said no. They were really job hunting. He said, this is impossible, you must be from one of these parties, and put them in prison for three months despite their claims of innocence. The point is, as a youth, he could not imagine that they could not be members of any of the parties. That was the way things were then.

Overall, the struggle was to bring about social justice. It was much later that the issue of women was raised. First, the issue was to change the social structures. Our struggle was about eradicating poverty, giving land back to the tiller, fighting against all forms of social injustices. Whatever the outcome, it was a struggle that touched and affected all the strata of the social world.

Tesfa

The making of an activist

I started becoming politically active at the university where the student movement was stirring. At the time, the environment was highly politicized; moreover the international context was politicized and conducive to activism with many agendas, which were linked to socialist solutions. Many rights issues started to be raised: “land to the tiller, the right to organize, the rights of nations and nationalities”. It was time for a system change. The old feudalist system needed to be abolished.

Everybody wanted change, both the population and, particularly, the students, who by then had gone through the process of radicalization. They would no longer accept anything less than complete structural change. The youth, galvanized by socialist ideology, expected and wanted to bring about social change, where people would be more equal and free to choose their government. A number of books related to radical movements circulated at that time. We read a lot on issues like dialectical materialism, historical materialism … It was in that school [the university] that the spirit of struggle was inculcated in me.

Before that, I could only feel sadness and helplessness when I saw the level of poverty of my community. Seeing the suffering of people desolated me, as a person, an individual. I can say that while my family basically had what it needed, the poverty of the community I was raised in was severe. I lived in a poor society but yet one filled with deep-seated social relationships and a sense of responsibility to one another. The spirit of sharing was one of the important values in the community. Hence, I grew up learning values like helping your

neighbour or the poor. I also observed the hardship of women's life, battered women; I grew up seeing all this injustice. All this was embedded in me and used to fill me with sadness. Then we also had to deal with the issue of drought and its consequences. All in all, we could say that overcoming all these challenges seemed difficult. You accepted it as God's will, something you cannot change or can only overcome through prayers. My grandmother thought so, as did my mother, therefore so did I. My grandmother and my mother were believers, the whole community observed Christian values.

So I came into the university with all these values, with that baggage. There you learn and become aware that some of the things you believed were wrong. There I was told there is a solution to this injustice, that the problem came from the system, that everybody is equal. It gave you hope for a bright future. It was no longer about helping your neighbour when you can, or sharing what you have. Everything was due to the unfair system that was in place. If the system was fair, those without land would have land; those who were unemployed would be employed. Once I went through this process of thought, the solution became crystal clear. Consequently, you come to the logical conclusion that if the problem is the system, then change it.

The student movement

That's how I got into activism within the student movement. At first, we started questioning some of the government decisions, raised some of the issues, then we organized some protests, which over time evolved as our movement radicalized and turned into a fully fledged series of demonstrations against Haile Selassie's regime.

Once the regime was overthrown by the military, two beliefs emerged – some observed that the Derg was socialist and opted for the strategy of working within the system, by guiding it through some kind of political pressure. Others disagreed, considering the undemocratic nature of the new military regime and its decisions to be prohibitive of our organizing and demonstration rights. It could only be changed by force because it was undemocratic and military. I too was among those who believed that this would not be solved democratically. The cause we were defending was worth dying for; therefore, if we had to we would go to armed struggle to bring about the necessary changes. Even at school, we had discussions within what we called study groups, about Marx's historical materialism, dialectical materialism, and Lenin's writings, etc. … We were looking at how these writings could be linked to or were relevant to our context.

Subsequently, organizations were established, and my inclination was towards Abiot**,** because at that time EPRP focused more on class struggle and was not that committed to issues related to the rights of nations and nationalities. At that time Abiot still criticized EPRP on that issue. At night we read, and wrote up our ideas and slogans. In the morning, we distributed these in different neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, EPRP had become stronger and more organized. Finally, discussion

about joining forces with EPRP and influencing decisions from within started to circulate in our party. We had discussion between our cell members and eventually the leadership of Abiot made the strategic decision to join EPRP. Those of us who did not agree left the party but I for one did not give up on the struggle.

Tigray Agricultural Development Unit (TADU)

Instead I joined a World Bank programme called the Tigray Agricultural Development Unit [TADU] in Shire, a remote place in Tigray. The programme's goal was to facilitate peasants' access to clean water, basic healthcare and education. I needed to build up a relationship of trust with the peasants, to be able to convince them of the benefit of living grouped in the same area, as opposed to living scattered around large remote areas. I also used that time learning about the reality of people's lives by observing and talking to them.

But also, I used that time getting used to the hardship of life in guerrilla struggle, which I was sure I would be joining when the time came, which I did in 1968 [Ethiopian calender]. I worked there until TPLF accepted women. When they did accept women into the struggle, I did not join the struggle immediately because TPLF needed TADU to remain open and continue its activities. I was in a key position to help them access all the resources they needed. So we were told to remain there until it was no longer possible for us to have access to all the resources (we had tractors, medication).

Women and the armed struggle within TPLF

We were conscious of the hard life of the guerrilla fighter. We knew that there would be times where we would go hungry, sleep on hard floors, and get cold, sick – even worse, die on the battlefield. But we were sure of our cause; we wanted to bring social transformation and we were ready to die for it. The first woman who joined TPLF in 1967 was called Martha, named after Martha Mebratu, who was one of the five activists who were killed while hijacking the Ethiopian Airlines flight in 1972.

First, you undergo three months of military training; you do that in a very remote area, where the Derg had no access. The training was physically exhausting, especially for city girls like me. I remember a lot of running, going up on the mountains … and the heat made it particularly hard. However, I think that our trainers were very understanding; they used to pair me up with two people who could follow my rhythm so I could finish the trajectory [path]. For us women, one of the difficulties we had was when we were menstruating. However, while some would say it doesn't matter, we still can be as good as men and continue their efforts, for others it was particularly difficult because we did not have pads, we had reusable cloths that you had to wash and carry with you. It was not at all comfortable to run and do all the physical work while dealing with that.

In the meantime, while taking the military training I used to give my comrades what we called the political training. At the time, those of us who came from university, as the most enlightened people of the group, worked on the content of the political training. We thought about the goal of the struggle, why we do what we do, our strategies and what the nature of the Derg was and why and how we could fight it.

TPLF had different departments like economic, military, health and political. I was assigned to the political department so I did political work, like prepare publications for our fighters and the public at large. The dissemination was done by front-line activists and what we called "*bado sebat*", who went from city to city as well as the rural areas. This is how we advertised our actions and goals. In addition, we organized public education sessions for all groups of people, in the areas we controlled.

Particularly, we organized and raised the awareness of women. At first they did not even take us for women. We had to bare our breasts and prove to them we were women for them to believe that women could actually do all that we did. How could women take arms? They really were trapped in their beliefs, so we had to discuss with them, assist in their "*Mariam or Silassie maheber*, (traditional associations) etc. …", and drink coffee with them so that they were convinced of our gender. Their next question was what are you doing in this remote area? Don't you have mothers? How come your parents let you do that? You don't look like orphans. How come you chose to leave everything for this?

They were mystified, then we told them the reason for our struggle – we do it so that you can have access to your land, so that you can have clean water, you can go to school, and your children can go to school. I chose to do so because I was educated. If you have education you can solve a lot of your problems; praying and waiting for God's help is not the solution. God gave us brains to think and act; the problems you are suffering from are not God-sent, they come from the system, and a system can be changed. We followed them around, we did what they did, and we participated in their social life. If we needed to see them individually we did so. And if they needed help in their daily activities we helped them, babysat, cooked and cleaned for them. All this helped us to build a relationship of trust where they could confide in us.

During the Red Terror period a lot of young people, both male and female, escaped from the city and came to rural areas looking for refuge, and some joined the movement. This amazed the local people because, they would say, these city boys and girls had everything, education, and a bright future, and instead they sacrificed all this for us. Moreover, the TPLF educational programme had by then integrated women's issues. We had a large women's rights agenda. We discussed marriage and how it is a partnership, and the harms

resulting from early marriage. They were aware of the health hazards and the risk of fistulas. We explained to them the importance of land ownership and property rights. We also told them that they could participate in public life, participate in the management of their community's health and legal systems, etc.

After the land reform, when women had access to land, they saw it was true. We observed change. However, there was a big resistance from the men about the land issue. They could not accept the land ownership of women. We tried to resolve this resistance through discussions and we convinced some of them. In this way, some women became landowners. We told women that if they were not economically empowered then they would always be dependent on men. If you get divorced, you won't leave empty-handed, you take your share.

Now that we had some liberated areas, we had to develop administrative structures, like judiciary institutions, health services, as well as educational institutions. So now all we had to do was to promote women's participation in all sectors of public life. Therefore, it was time to give women a role in the public life of the area. We promoted women's participation in the local election. The women understood that this was indeed empowering. Consequently, they started to mobilize and participate in the local election process. They started building up their confidence and expressing their opinions in public and claiming that they could indeed become administrators. As a result, a few of them were elected in their kebele administrations. That, I think, contributed a lot to their adherence to TPLF's ideas. And for us, also, this was a big accomplishment and a big part of our objective.

And we were very active; our TPLF group was very active and focused. First, we started by organizing ourselves and establishing a women's affairs structure within TPLF, which met with big resistance from men. We responded that we did not create this to fight against you, but, rather, to fight male chauvinism. We also needed to fight against our own inferiority complex. Moreover, we needed a separate structure to better organize ourselves and be effective in our work of the politicization process of women in general. However, since the leadership was for the idea, we were able to organize while at the same time doing our regular work for the bigger organization.

Nevertheless, we were so motivated to do what we had to do, in order to raise women's awareness and contribute to the improvement of their everyday life. The more women fighters we had, the more human resources we had to reach all the liberated areas and teach women and get their support … When I tell you this it's because I am talking about women, our organization. I am not talking about TPLF as a whole.

Around 1975 [Ethiopian calendar], at the second congress of our organization, I was elected as one of the members of the central

committee, responsible for the economic sector that oversaw both TPLF and all the liberated areas. Not only did we administer the economic and financial situation of the organization but also the liberated areas and communities' economic, health and legal systems. That also included managing farming and farming systems, so that we could increase the crops.

In 1977 [Ethiopian calendar], we had to face the consequences of the drought. We had to organize and save as many people as we could. I was one of the committee members who had to deal with that. So, those able people who could travel long distances – we facilitated their escape route to Sudan. More than two hundred thousand people fled to Sudan, while those who were less able to manage the long journey, like the elderly, children and women, remained, as we tried to get them as much aid as we could manage. As for some, we encouraged them to go to Derg-controlled areas despite the risk of the Derg's uncertain response. It was very challenging and sad as a lot of people lost their lives …

About feminism within TPLF

By then, 30% of the TPLF guerrilla fighters were female. We could have had more, since many wanted to join, but they were needed to stay in the civilian world. Moreover, at that time no personal relationships between male and female fighters were allowed. No marriage was allowed. We were all committed to our organization.

Women's organizations, both within TPLF and in TPLF-controlled territories, managed both to survive the war and support the struggle by providing for the army, looking after the wounded – women were everywhere they were needed. That was because they believed that this would bring about transformative change. They mobilized because they adhered to TPLF's commitments. Without the support of women, TPLF would not have succeeded. The challenge was that, as more of the youth, both male and female, joined the struggle, only old people and mothers remained in their communities, leaving no men to farm in a society where only men could do this work. So we encouraged women to do farming activities. At first it worked, but then the women realized that they were overworked, as they still had to carry out their other domestic activities. Consequently, it was no longer seen as a long-term solution – not because they couldn't do it, but it was adding to their everyday burden of fetching water and firewood as well as caregiving activities.

Several solutions were proposed to solve this problem, such as young women without family responsibilities helping those who had them, or supporting the elderly. For example, we said why not ask the men to gather firewood on their way back home from their farming? But this did not work. Looking back, I think we were too radical in those days. Then the men were not willing to change; even within our organization some resistance started to emerge, they started saying that it "was a feminist trend". All our efforts to have more women doing farming and

asking men to gather firewood on their way back home were not accepted by men and backfired on us. Some of the leadership members said that this was feminism. Once this label was given to our activities, we realized that that we no longer had the support of some of the leadership. We realized they did not like the way we thought and the way we acted.

Looking back, I think that they were probably looking at the long-term consequences of our actions. They were probably thinking, where are these women taking us? Who is in the leadership position? Are they the ones leading or are we? I think they probably had these concerns. I think some friction started to emerge between us because of this feminist lebel. The way I understand it now, this was used as a way to move us slowly but surely from the position of power. They even convened a conference to denounce our feminist position. In reality, it was convened as the second women's conference. We had had our first conference in 1975/1976 where we defended our actions: we exposed how we organized women, how we raised people's consciousness, and particularly how we exposed men's chauvinism, both within TPLF and in society at large. At the time it was men who were criticized. It was admitted that male chauvinism was a problem and it should be rooted out. At the second conference, the reverse happened. We were the ones on the accused bench, where we were blamed, for not our feminist actions, but rather for being feminists.

In addition to the new trend of denouncing feminism and feminists there were many discussions and debates about how men's performance was much better than ours, how we did not run as fast as men, etc., Representatives of women from different sections of our organization were present. A fierce debate occurred where we explained that the leadership did not appreciate what the women did or what they had accomplished and that, for the same performance, they would be more likely to promote the men fighters into leadership positions. Our criticism was of course directed at the leadership of TPLF. So this conflict occurred between us. With regard to the feminist issue, we responded that we were not feminists but, rather, pragmatists, and we did our best to find solutions to the problems that arise. We could have made some mistakes, and they could have told us that our solutions were wrong, without labelling us as feminists, because for them feminism by definition meant being against men in general ("*tsere wend*": man-haters). And we had to respond that we were not against men, we were here to defend and die for both men and women.

In reality, they just wanted to attack those [women] who were in or close to the leadership because they set out their conditions, saying so-and-so cannot be elected – that is, meaning us. And we knew it was just a strategy to remove us. The good thing was that the ordinary conference participants knew that this was just a show to remove us; they tried to keep us and defended us, particularly the representatives of women fighters coming from the armed forces. That was why the

conference lasted so long. But in the end the leadership won. The conference concluded with the argument that it was just a trend. They [the leadership] succeeded in having their supporters elected because there were women who supported their position. Actually, you can say that "that is the trend", that has not changed over time because that is what we are still experiencing today. The sad thing is that the leadership never applied self-criticism, and that is regrettable.

Rahel

The path to activism

In terms of my background, I was born in a family of four girls. Both my parents were, I think, extremely happy that they had four girls, and it didn't matter to my father or to my mother that they didn't have a boy. It was not by choice – this is what God gave them. And we were raised basically without having to interact with boys, we were raised the same way that young people would go through in any given family, fighting between us, but without experiencing the different kind of treatment between boys and girls and so on.

My father's principles were very simple. You have to get an education, that's what's going to get you ahead. And I will support you to the extent that I can for you to get the best education possible. My father was a lawyer by training, was a parliamentarian, but also he was in the military and served under Haile Selassie, so he had his own values and principles that he instilled: love of country, respect, so on and so forth …

My mother was a very hardworking young woman. When she married my father, she was very young. And she was home-schooled. She never went to school. So my father, being a fantastic role model for a lot of Ethiopian men to this day, basically asked her what she wanted to do with her life. And she wanted to go to school and she went to school after she got married. She started a business at a time when women in her society, in her class and surroundings, were not allowed to go out and work. And you know she defied it, not defiantly, she was not militant in the way we know, she was not trying to set an example but she did what she wanted to do with the support of my dad.

So I have seen that growing up, and to me it was like if women wanted to do anything they could do it. I didn't have anything that held me back. That's the starting point. A lot of people start with disjointed families or all sort of things they have to deal with; for me I had it easy. Then I went to, as you know, the French school, the lycée … At the time, in the seventies, you have all these student movements coming up. You have these entire civil rights movements worldwide and so on. Even in the country, when people like Tilahun Gizaw were being killed … we did not even know what was going on, let alone participate. We were completely shielded. Actually, our school at some point was fined because it was open when all schools were supposed to be closed. To that extent, we were oblivious to it.

So that [the political engagement] did not come from the school either … until I reached the 1ere [grade 12] and somehow the system changed a little bit. There was a little bit of an opening, for we had an Amharic teacher who would tell us … he comes from Menen School and I think was a teacher there. Ato … what was his name? I forget … Anyway, he started telling us, this is what's happening, this is why students are protesting. So I came home and tried to get a sense of what my parents felt about it. I did not get that feedback. So for me it was crazy students out there demonstrating up and down the streets until I started understanding a little bit. And by the time I thought I was a little bit aware of what was going on – especially the killings, and a lot of students went to jail, some of them we knew, we knew the family … Ene Tamerat Kebede … So, we were like, what's going on? So, you know, you could feel that there were things going on. Then one of the things that really marked that period of my life, I am getting on to the university and the activism part of it …

But before that, I think I was 11 or 12 years old, I was reading this magazine entitled *Mennen* magazine, which was a women's magazine. And I read this article about this woman who was running for parliament, for house representative. She was from Jima, from Limo of all places. She was a Muslim woman; she was running on this very strange political agenda, which was to stop Ethiopian girls from wearing miniskirts, from wearing make-up, etc. And it was saying, these are not our values, our culture so on … And I read that. I was sitting by the fireplace, I was 11 or 12 years old, I turned to my father and said I am going to respond to this woman. I saw a big smile on my father's face. And I wrote a three-page response to her short article, basically saying, if you want to run for office, and if you really want to fight for people, the people in Limo have absolutely nothing to do with miniskirts, they have probably never seen miniskirts. In that community women do this and that, I've never lived there but I've been there briefly on vacation. I started articulating what I thought were the needs of poor women in Ethiopia. And this woman was going to go to parliament and fight for something that has nothing to do with their lives. So I don't know if I was conscious but I remember writing that article. My father was so proud of me he took the article and said *Mennen* magazine is not going to publish this. And I said why? Because it's three pages, it's too long. So I said okay, help me edit it. So my father helped me edit it. And it was published in *Mennen* magazine with my name, Rahel. This woman thought that I was actually a contender or whatever, and she responded to W/ro Rahel, it was so hilarious. Oh W/ro Rahel. So that was the only thing that really struck me. You know, how can women get into these positions? There are so many barriers, such glass ceilings. You get that opportunity and you lose it by taking the wrong issue or fighting for the wrong agenda. That must have been the grain, the seed that was in there.

Then I went to university. I was there during the emperor's birthday, that famous birthday celebration … I had absolutely no idea that there was famine in Ethiopia. So I wanted to show to my French friends,

whoever I met in France, that Ethiopia was this beautiful country, that we had everything and were very happy, blah blah … you know … until I met people from the student movement, in the same town as me. I was in Aix-en-Provence, that's where I did my law degree. You know, we had famous people like Fikre Merid, Negede Gobezie, etc. These are people who had actually finished at Addis Ababa University and who went there to do their PhDs. So they were older than me, so I looked up to them, as my parents were not there, so they became sort of my role models, after my father and mother, I guess. They really took care of me, and educated me. So, I first thought, they are insulting the emperor, what's going on? Are they giving the right picture of Ethiopia? That's not the Ethiopia I knew, so it was an eye-opener for me when they started, you know, fighting around the issue of famine.

At that time, the only thing I knew was to write good French. I was much better than all of them in French. I came from the lycée of Addis, and I was very proud of myself. So one day, they asked me to write a speech about famine. There was going to be a big campaign. So I did, I sat down and I wrote what I thought was a beautiful speech. I have lost it, I wish I had kept it. It's really been a stepping-stone for me.

I prepared it and the guy who was supposed to read it somehow did not make it to the meeting. There were 2,000 young students sitting in a huge hall waiting for somebody to deliver the speech about famine in Ethiopia. There I was, so I was told, you wrote the speech, since the president of the association, I don't even know who that was, is not present, you are going to have to read it. I have never, ever done anything more than a recitation [French] in a classroom in my lycée. What I did was I started reading it. I read it, like, you know, with a shaky voice, but French is my first language, almost. So when I looked up, I saw a lot of people crying and it was also because my voice was shaking, I was talking about famine, and they thought it was because of the emotion when actually it was fear. So that was my baptism. From that moment on I think I was sort of empowered to speak in public and I felt very good about myself, it means I can do it too, I can convince people and talk about issues, and I have not stopped. So that's the beginning.

But I was not sure whether I really wanted to join the student movement. They were talking about Marxism and Leninism, I had absolutely no idea who Marx, Lenin or Engels, all those people, were; I did not understand what the purpose was of doing that? Besides, I was more much focused on my education, and these people had nothing to do with that. So it was very difficult for me to make that shift. It took me quite a while and I stayed very distant.

And that is the period where I start observing what was going on. You know, gradually I started going to the meetings. It took me a year or two years, I don't remember when I first joined the student's movement. But I knew about it because I lived with those very

articulate people, with issues and so on. So I started reading, I started joining their clubs, you know, study groups, and there is nothing I do halfway, that's the thing I have learned from this. I either do it well or I don't, so I started really getting involved, reading, etc. I travelled all the way to East Berlin to get books because they were free from the Chinese Embassy there. I was actually caught on the way back carrying books; anyway, I did all what the students did.

The women's wing of the student's organization

But in around 1974, when the Revolution started and people got excited about things changing in Ethiopia, I really wanted to come back. But I was in the middle of my studies and I didn't want to disappoint my parents at the same time. So I wanted to do these two things parallel to each other. That's when I discovered that there was a women's wing in the student's movement that was headed by a group of women who at that time were very much part of what ended up being EPRP. You know that kind of group. There was already a split in the student's movement and I did not want to be involved one way or the other but I wanted to hear from both. So actually I came into a group that was very much on one side, as the spokesperson of almost the other side, because I wanted everybody to read both. So that was me, I wanted justice, I wanted fairness, etc., etc..

So for me personally that's the reason why I never joined any organization in the end. Because I wanted to hear it all, and I wanted to make my own judgement. I didn't want to be influenced. But when I saw the women's organization, they were like completely … They had hijacked it and used it for whatever party they actually belong to in the background that's so and so [names taken out for confidentiality], and other people I don't want to mention. Basically, I started fighting. I had, like, three of my colleagues from France who supported me. My position was clear, the women's movement has to stand on its own, has to have its own agency. We don't want to be part of this, that or the other. We just want to make sure we are raising women's issues. And it's going to be on the agenda, and we really are going to talk about how to empower Ethiopian women. So I did get involved in that, I ended up being the president of the association and wrote a lot about Ethiopian women, read a lot about Ethiopian women. And I felt like I was on top of whatever there is to know and to do. That's where my activism really started.

Return to Addis

So I was really looking forward to coming back to Ethiopia. For me, I was ready to come back and run a literacy class if that meant empowering 10 women. I was no more ambitious than that. So I was, like, politically motivated in that sense but I really wanted the grassroots movements to be sort of, part of this change process and the women in particular.

When I came back I joined the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MoUDH). By the way, I forgot to tell you I started my PhD at

the university of Sorbonne. I did the first part, which is the DEA (MPhil), I got my DEA and they gave me a three-year scholarship to do my PhD thesis. That was too much for me – I was not going to stay three years. I thought I would miss the Revolution in Ethiopia. So I packed up and came back. So that's what happened. I came back with a lot of illusions. Yeah, with a lot of hope, but the very first day I came back the place was in huge turmoil. Fikre had just been killed. The whole movement was in jeopardy. And there was nothing close to what I intended and hoped to do. After that, there was basically chaos. Then I ended up after two years or a year in Ethiopia, where the whole thing started falling apart, I ended up getting put in jail.

I remember the very first question I was asked was, how come your husband is a member of the central committee of Meison and you are not a member of Meison? I don't know, that's my husband and you ask him. Meison did not recruit me and I am not a member of Meison. But I am a sympathizer and they are all my friends, so that's what got me four years in prison and I was tortured very badly, because they couldn't figure out who I was, they really thought, she is educated, she came from France therefore she must be running the whole movement, the underground movement, which was absolutely not the case. Anyway, I ended up in prison, I spent four years there, I came out, so that's part of my life.

Activism embedded in the context

You have to put this in a global context, because at the time we were activists, there were a lot of things happening in the world, there was the Vietnam War, the whole movement against the Vietnam War, the movement with Angela Davis and Malcolm X, etc. …. you could not *not* be an activist in those days. That was the problem, you walked into a university dorm – that is, when I was a student in France in the seventies, we all had Che Guevara, Angela Davis and we had Malcolm X. Did we know much about these people? No, but you don't want to be out of place in that context (this is why I agree with what Meles[88] said, that context is crucial). In those days we thought that you could change the world. The new generation is different. In our situation, all those activists like Meles, etc. … went into the bush. I mean, their dream was not becoming a doctor or getting their PhD. They could have had a wonderful life. But no, all these people were idealists, so activism was so close to idealism in the seventies.

So we start off thinking about, well, maybe there are other ways of doing it. I was thrown down to some extent. So the next generation didn't see what happened. You don't have to come to the 2014 generation; 20 years ago I went back to Berlin, which was where we used to meet as students. It's fantastic, you go the university and there are no signs, no posters, it's clean, it's beautiful. There are no

[88] Meles was one of the founding members of TPLF, President of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991–1994), and Prime Minister of Ethiopia between 1995 and 2012

issues that they are ready to take on. So when this movement started in the US, the anti–Wall Street, anti–war in Iraq, I was like, oh here are the movements, they are starting … but they just come and go, they coma and go. And it's not because the activism is not within people who are for justice, etc. it's just that the way they express it, the structures that support it, are very different.

I think that young people are picking up on issues. For example, if you look at Ferguson, what happened – the racial case of Michael Brown killed in Ferguson and the movement there. And there you look at Facebook and Twitter; all those young people are saying, what is going on? So we went through the civil rights movement and we saw Obama in power, and now you have another generation coming up and saying it's not enough to have women up there, it's not enough to have a Black president. No, what we need is a shift in paradigm. We need to change the agenda; we need to make sure that what we call justice is actually part of the values of the institutions that we support. And that's a new thing. How do you do it, I don't know. That's why when we say activism, the operational side of activism is going to be very different. The motivation of activism is still going be justice. Justice within that society, it may be racial justice, maybe sexual, gender … I don't know. It's just that kind of equality, and equity, because we forget the issue of equity.

Right now, we may have an equal number of women in parliament – we fought for 30% women among parliamentarians. In some countries we have it but have these countries changed when it comes to the rights of women? Not necessarily, so it's not the number, it's the fundamental change in the way we think.

Giving meaning to activism

For me, activism is basically being emboldened in a movement. At what level, to what extent, have you acted as an activist is an individual decision. But it is really being involved in a movement, a movement for change, a movement for social justice. You could be an activist for fundamentalist principles too. So activism is being involved to change something, or move an agenda forward. And this is why you should add feminism. There are all sorts of movements … you really have to give it content. Activism is a form of protest, form of organizing for change. What that change is can go many different ways.

So when I came back from France and I started working first for the MoUDH, I was asked to organize women in urban sectors. This is during the Derg, I was very happy. It landed me in prison in a year, but it was okay. So when you sit down and meet with women and you find out what their concerns are it is very difficult to go beyond the very immediate needs, it's very difficult to discuss the strategic needs. You know you can't talk about agency, you can't talk about space, you can't talk about reproductive rights, and you cannot talk about any of

these issues. It was all around economic empowerment, the social and economic needs of women, and it's not even political.

That was something I realized very quickly. You have to identify the women who are in the forefront to be able to work with them. I didn't have time for that transition. So basically, maybe the way to the empowerment of women is to start with economic empowerment. That brings them together. That shows them their potential that they can organize around – I don't care if it is commodities or whatever, but if it gives them a consciousness of them being agents of economic change, why not? And I still think that we have left it at that. That's what I experienced in that year. You could feel that there was more, but when there was more it was the activists that were already engaged in other organizations who were trying to use a constituency of women who had absolutely had no understanding of what EPRP is or whatever it stands for …

So the strategic entry point into movements was really the challenge for many activists in Ethiopia. What are the strategic entry points, what are the triggers that would rally women around issues and bring them into another stage? And it wasn't just about women. If there was a strong movement within Ethiopia it would be easy to, it's not an add-on, but to bring in issues critical to women. That did not exist in my view. It was all about power. It was all about power … and I don't know if women were interested at that time.

Appendix C

Narratives of the negotiators

Almaze

Childhood and Educational background

I do not remember anything in my childhood that contributed to my present situation. I believe that the fact I am here today in this situation is chance. However, whatever made me decide and dedicate my life to this issue, I will come back to that later, but first let me tell you about my childhood years.

Going back to the age of 11, since that time I was solely raised by my mum, who happened to be illiterate but bright and wise. At home I was treated equally with the boys; we were seven siblings, of which the eldest was a girl. By the time I was going to school she had started working, without completing her studies. Among the younger ones I was the eldest of my brothers and I was never asked to contribute to household activities. I was told to concentrate on my homework and had the opportunity to study. I don't remember experiencing the different gender roles assigned to boys and girls at home.

What I remember is, however, seeing the hardship my mother went through to take care of us. That has made me realize the sacrifices and responsibilities assumed by women in general and mothers in particular. As I said, unfortunately my mum was not educated. Not being educated is one of her regrets. So my mum believed so much in education that all of us her children have been given the opportunity to go to school.

I went to Etege Menen School until grade 8, then joined Teferi Mekonnen, a comprehensive high school that could prepare you for the academic field or the employment sector with secretarial science training. And I continued my high school, in the commercial section. I could have joined the academic section but I did not, because coming from both a separated family and an underprivileged environment I needed to hurry out of the school system and join the workforce to be able to contribute to the family income.

Once I graduated from high school, I did not go to the university to study but to work. That allowed me to work while continuing my education at the university. I was accepted in the business administration department and chose to specialize in management over accounting. After graduation, in addition to my full-time day job at the university, I got a part-time teaching position for the night shift course (the extension programme). After a while, I got a scholarship to do an MBA in the Netherlands. Back from the Netherlands with an MBA, I wanted to get into the academic field but was integrated into the administrative department of the university. However, I was allowed to teach part-time during the regular programme.

The influence of private lives

Meanwhile, after getting my degree, I started living with my partner, who happened to be my superior. I found him very abusive; even before I moved in with him he was abusive and I wanted to break up with him. I could not and did not. That's when I got the opportunity to go for a scholarship and left. When I came back, somehow things did not work for me, so I moved in with him. Three weeks after our marriage I could not take it and I moved out. So he did what is usually the tradition in this case, he sent a group of elders to talk me into getting back with him. I said to myself, leaving a marriage after three weeks, it's unheard of, they would tell me that marriage has its up and downs and that three weeks is not enough. So I moved back in to gather more evidence to make my case. Seven months later, I was getting back home from a long day at work, when he just started to insult me. He used – let's just say inappropriate language. I was late getting back from work because the following day was graduation day at the university. And as an organizing committee member I had to work late. So I went back out and never returned home to him. My married life was over after just seven months.

For me, unless you are in a good marriage, it can become a lifelong servitude to a man. He tried to stop my personal growth, minimize my achievements. Like me, he taught at the university, but unlike me he had a PhD. The problem was, if I ever did research on something, he tended to depreciate my work and efforts with remarks like "as if you could make an earth-shaking contribution to knowledge". So I said no to this, no, no and no. Once I made up my mind, I never looked back. I was firm; in addition, I had my mum's support. She was my role model, she was courageous, and that helped me stick with my decision. From that time I concentrated on my own progress and achievements. I don't have children but I have lots of nieces and nephews that I supported and even raised.

The path to activism

I continued like this up until the arrival of the actual regime. At that time, I was among the leadership of the university, which was dismissed by the new transitional government due to some contestation movements that occurred within the campus. Forty-five people were fired, with no prospects of employment, not because we were incompetent – rather, because people and/or organizations were afraid to hire us. Actually, if you asked me what we did wrong, not all of us were involved in the contestation, and I was among those who were not involved. I think one of the points the contesters were raising was why the police entered the university premises. Anyway, we started looking for employment. Since organizations did not want to hire us, while some went into self-employment I applied for a human resources management position, advertised in the newspapers by an international NGO. Since I had experience in a leadership position of a big university, I was hired easily. Working for this INGO was like working on another planet. From working in the academic world and

managing 4,000 employees, I had gone to managing 33 or 34 employees. I found it a bit difficult to get used to the new culture. Because for approximately the last 18, or more than 20 years, from the day I finished high school, I had only worked for the university. Anyway, I had no choice; I had to get used to it, because nobody wanted to hire us. I think, unlike the NGOs, neither the private sector nor international agencies wanted to hire us, because they did not want to start a bad working partnership with the new government. On the other hand, for NGOs, looking into human rights issues was one of their missions, and I guess they were more open to hiring us. After a while I got used to my new working environment; I immediately realized that working on issues related to social justice is meaningful to personal satisfaction. I worked there for four years. During that time, even though I was the HR head, I also participated and worked in the programmes. That is, I started going out to fieldwork, and observing people's lives in rural Ethiopia, and more particularly I noticed women's burdens in their everyday life. At that time, my organization had a project in Dalouch, you could see women doing all the hard work while men did little and chewed chat. Women did most of the work.

Reassessing her university experience through a gender lens

During my work experience at the university I don't remember experiencing any "visible" discrimination, but I have noticed that we were a small number of women, both in the leadership positions and the academic field, which I really regret. At the time when I was promoted as the head of the … department of the university, my immediate superior gave me the go-ahead to appoint my team members, and I consciously decided that it would be composed of competent women only. I want to make clear I chose them not because they were women but because they were qualified women who as usual kept a low profile. More women than men worked in the department and I hoped that this had proved the capacity of women to take on management responsibilities.

What usually happens during meetings of the university leadership is that there is the token woman. I did not like being the token woman in these meetings, what I have noticed is that for some women this shows their achievement and they are proud to be the only one among their male colleagues but for me it is nonsense. I can do what any of my colleagues do there, but for me so what? I can even do better than some of them. The question is, why are women less represented in these circles? I have always asked myself this question.

Feminist activism?

Once I joined the international NGO, the aim was clear, it was a matter of supporting women, helping women fight their subordination. I am a free woman, I can fight for rights myself, so what? It does not make sense if other women live in misery. So if we assume the entry

point is economic power, women could not only take care of themselves but could also take responsibility for their other rights. They could decide for themselves. What I usually see here, when they have access to money, women take responsibility, make decisions with regard to their marriages. They start to say enough is enough, learn to say no. NO. They know they can say no because they can afford to live on their own.

Once in a while they are confronted by husbands who extend their ultimatums – give up the self-help programme or else. They tell them "your marriage or self-help, choose". I think that they felt threatened, I think it's fear of I don't know what … And some of them chose self-help bluntly, where this comes from is from all the training they go through, our role is to show them their potential and teach them how to use it. Consequently, that also enables them to fight for their rights.

Today we have thousands of women members who have gone through our training. Our training does not actually have a visible or an explicit section on gender, or gender equality. But when you look at it thoroughly, a deeper analysis of gender emerges. That is the politics. For example, the word transformation has no political connotation, and we have a course entitled "transformational leadership", basically designed to enable them to think differently – that is, guide them towards a fundamental shift in their thinking process. Designed as a leadership course, it could pass for what it is.

The other method is to use our case studies. In our training manuals we use real cases where family dynamics are explored and discussed. That is, to show you that we have adapted to the new legal framework in which we find ourselves. In addition, we have what we call Family Conversation Day where we try to engage the whole family, and Husbands Day.

For the Family Conversation Day, families are invited, including husband and wife, children over 18, and any adults or extended family living in the household. The aim is for successful families to share their experiences with others and be role models to each other. Through programmes such as these, the likelihood of changing mentalities is as good as any training on gender. We don't have to call it gender rights equality or advocacy, etc. … For what we call Husbands Day also, we bring out couples, it all starts from the home, you can call it power relations and so on, it all starts from the home.

- An empowered woman at home means a higher probability of her being assertive outside her home.

- An empowered woman at home is a role model for the next generation, and it means a higher probability of her daughter growing up empowered.

- The son of an oppressed/subdued/subservient woman would grow up to become an oppressor, and that's what we see.

So our main goal is to empower women, help women achieve economic empowerment, but the reality is they end up also getting social and political empowerment. Economic empowerment is the perfect entry point; that is why we focus on it. In the 2005 election, we had five candidates from our members, at that time we had training on gender, family law and parliamentary elections, etc. … We encouraged them to register, to participate in the election, and to vote, not who to vote for, but to vote.

Finally, five of our members had decided to run for a seat at the regional and local level. This was an amazing thing to witness for me and most satisfactory. To tell you the truth, I am not sure I would have had the courage to do so. When you ask how come and why did they want to run – they told us, we have learned a lot through our training, we have learned to discuss, speak out in public, so why not. As you know, the 2005 election was mostly between the leading party and the main opposition party, so it was a lost cause for those who ran as independent candidates.

Hence, our programmes more or less opened their eyes, their horizons; once this was done, some integrated into the political or institutional structures and participated, even if at first they needed a little push. But after a while, they participated a lot, they were very vocal, they really tried to look after "women's welfare", if I can word it this way. That is because, first, their passage here was intense, as they'd had a lot of discussion sessions on different issues. Second, in our association we do have elected leaders who work on issues such as governance. Among these leaders, some are members of the general assembly, others are members of our board and are also in the union of cooperatives, as there is a network of 63 savings and credit cooperatives that we have helped establish. Each cooperative has its own leaders who manage it, and the leaders have created a union of cooperatives with its own board and general assembly. All this serves as a training forum in which they have the opportunity to practise their leadership skills. That empowers them, and they even argue with me, they could tell me, Almaze, you have no right to exclude me from the association. So that's it, that is my goal, to see them stand up for their rights. So this is what we have been doing, bringing change in the lives of women. What we are seeing now and what is visible is, as soon as the poor women get some money they invest it in their children's education. This is the 17th year of our existence, so we have a good number of our members' children who are now going to universities. And we give some of them their summer jobs. We have kids that we hired during the summer season who handled tasks like the distribution of seeds for the urban agriculture programmes. With a small summer occupation like that they make enough money to buy themselves a pair of shoes or their school uniform. Those are the children who are now joining universities.

It's great being educated. Only through education could these kids change their lives around. That is the only difference between us, we

are educated and their mothers were not. The only thing that differentiates us from them is that we got the opportunity to learn and earn degrees and be hired in offices, while their personal stories did not allow them to go to school; it's as simple as that. This is because some have come from rural areas with no family support, while others have run away, escaping from early marriages. With the opportunities and chances that we've had they could have achieved more or less what we have achieved. I firmly believe that. This is my belief. When you read their stories you can see how much power emerges from these women. Every month we write the stories of two exemplary women members and we distribute 5,000 copies of them.

About being an activist

This is what we do. If you ask me if I am an activist, I can tell you that my goal is to work towards the economic empowerment of women; in that sense I can say I am. In the context of social change, yes, I am, but I don't consider myself as a political activist, nor do I want to use the term political, but in the sense of contributing to the social empowerment of women, I can certainly say I am a social activist.

Ababa

Childhood and educational background

I was born and raised in Addis, in a family of four, I am the third girl and I have a younger brother. I went to a private Catholic school, which had at the time only primary and lower secondary levels. So I was not raised in an educational environment where boys and girls went to the same school, therefore I don't know that much about the differences about all these issues. My mother raised us. I believe that my mother was a strong woman. I can also say that I never got the idea of a man being better than a woman. The only person we had to make us better people, feed us or take care of us was my mother. And as a mother she had to play both the father's and mother's roles.

I think activism is like passion. It is something that comes from within, an internal rather than external thing. I don't know how you define it. For me it started as a need, a need within me that was looking for the truth. It might not be the same truth for others but it is about standing for that truth, that makes you active. So when I was a kid, I remember in my primary school, we were a group of girlfriends, and one of us wanted to be more respected, act more like the chief, you know we used to have the "*negus*" [king] of the group. We had that in our group and I was the one who said no [laughter] to that rule. When I think back now, I was always the odd one. I don't know why. I was a kid like all of them and I should have said yes, yes, yes … but I never accepted it. It would have been easier because you are liked if you do that. For example, if you are playing any group game like "Pepsi", even when she was bitten or disqualified, just because she was the "king", she continued with the game. I remember that. So I was always the one resisting this rule, for me she was out, she was out – no more, no less. And the others would say "*lenegesse tigba*" (that means that

whoever wins, she can join the winning group and continue to play). I said no, and of course I was excluded from the group. I joined another group, and the girls in the other group did the same. Finally I ended up in my first group for the Christmas show, and the "king" of that group and I became friends, you know; we are still friends now.

At home also, I remember, if I was punished for something I did not do, or for something I was misunderstood for, and I was asked to apologize for it, I would say no. I remember in these instances that I was not rebelling but I made sure that they knew that what was happening was wrong. These are small examples but are things that you keep in your memory. So as I said, it was not about external things but the meaning within that counted. Because I always kept asking why, why do people do mean things to other people? I never accepted injustice. I do things out of love and kindness, and I don't accept being taken for a foolish person. I can't take that. With maturity, as I have become a mother, I have become better.

The path to activism

When I became a lawyer it was about the law and rights. All the other legal provisions are interesting but my favourite subject was human rights. But, mind you, then I was interested in human rights not women's rights. After graduation I was assigned to court, as an assistant judge. That was still simple work. But when I went to the prosecutor's office, I had a chance to see the very vast crimes and the crimes of human rights violation that were committed by the Derg regime, which I did not know much about because I was a kid then. But all those things happened around me, so I said wow! How come such kinds of crimes could have happened in your country and you are not even that aware of it. Actually, people were aware of it, there was a fear, there was this atmosphere, but you did not know the degree: the number of people being in prison, being tortured, you know. That really hit me. And I said to myself, you know why this happened? Because the system allowed it, and the same system did not allow anyone to talk about it. So there was no one to say stop it, I guess, and if they did, they would have been killed. There was no freedom of speech, freedom to organize … So you can easily see a system of dictatorship, which was based on mass crimes, human rights violation in its worst form. It gave me a glimpse of that time.

And when I started studying the cases, I could not do them as just a lawyer or as a professional, I started looking at the cases as an activist. So when people came to testify and talk about it, I gave them an ear, I did not just write what they said. They came to testify, mothers came, mothers who had lost all their children, and for me it was so hard. I was very much devastated and my family was saying, stop this work. I was very young and did not need to go through such kind of trauma. It was a traumatic experience; I was almost going through the same experience over and over. I was living in it because from morning to night you had to take a lot of testimonies before we built our cases … to the point that sometimes you end up saying, how

many people did he kill? A hundred? And it all just becomes numbers rather than human beings. How do we lose the dignity of human beings and turn into numbers? That was a very disturbing feeling for me. And I just kept asking myself why, why, why? I didn't know much about politics at that time.

I decided to go on until the end of the process. Many people stopped, left that office. I did not because I felt that this is going to be what I personally give to my country so that this never happens again. Because if we don't prosecute**,** if we don't make cases, even if some were killed in a summary execution, and part of it was done by the state, people will never learn. But if we document it, if we bring it to court, and if the charts are there and the testimonies are there, whether these people are sentenced or not, it doesn't matter but the process is very important. And I found myself in this process and I needed to finish it. So I finished almost all my cases, even to the appeal level for those who decided to go to a higher court.

I was an associate prosecutor. And I did not want my life to be about work only. I did not want my work to be going to the office; I wanted work to be an extension of my life, an extension of my needs, my values, and my principles. What I cherish more is working with people. That is much more satisfying to me. With other kinds of work I might make more money, but I would feel very empty. For that purpose, I think God gave me the kind of job I needed. That's why I applied to EWLA; at that time EWLA was working on the establishment of the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA).

Defining women's / gender activism

It starts when you cannot accept seeing unfairness. I think everybody knows what is just and unjust. The difference is, some people can be just or fair and live their lives, without intervening when they see unfairness; others do not accept that and act, saying I can change that. So for me activism is standing for a cause. Deciding to act, not for the sake of acting but in order to bring about change. It is not something that is external, but rather something that comes from within you. It should be something that you give from yourself [*kerasish yemitisetchew neger mehone alebet*]. Getting up and talking about human rights may not necessarily be dangerous but sometimes it is. For example, when the state or government assumes things are rosy, wanting to give a more attractive image of the country, and you come up and say no, no, no, things are not going well, women are not treated fairly, many women are experiencing, etc., you are making trouble. So activism is being able to stand up for your cause, whether it occurs in an enabling or inhospitable environment [*bemimetchim bemaymetchim gize*]. Not only should you act and share it, like I said before, you should be able to transfer it to others. It is not about doing it as a job, but rather doing it as if it was your calling in life, that's simply it. It is not something that you do when you are at work, and when you leave, you stop being one. I don't think it is something that you can just stop. Activism is about an action, it is not just about

ideology; it is turning it into an action …. When it comes to women's issues, you can contribute to the issue in various ways. You can be a social worker, an officer or a director and contribute to women's issues in your field, but you may not necessarily be an activist. When you are an activist you go beyond your organization, go beyond your career to defend your cause, in this case improve the conditions of women in all sectors of life.

With regard to our activism, lately we have not been able to do as much activism as we did before. Because activism entails mobilizing, it is raising your voice, your own voice and that of others. For example, I remember it was during the "Kamilat case", Kamilat is the girl whose boyfriend poured acid on her face. At first, people were shocked and angered by the incident, a week later stories started to appear in newspapers, stories justifying the act of the guy. I don't know whether or not he paid for people to write those stories. You know how people are, so rumours that how, as his girlfriend, she took money from him, etc. … What amazed me then was people's reaction to that rumour; I immediately realized that we had to raise people's consciousness on this. So one day during a coffee break of a meeting, in which participated, this high government official for women's issues, I went up to her and as I just mentioned her name, and the case, she said yes, I have heard about the sad story, but I also heard what she did to him … I just could not believe it, this woman who seemingly represented the interests of women at a higher level was not convinced of her role. I had to remind her that even if all those stories were true, which they were not, she did not deserve to be burned with acid, that what he did was a crime, etc. …. Finally, she ended up agreeing with me; the sad thing is, that person should not have occupied that specific position, it is as simple as that. This was their meeting [which was organized by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs -(MoWCYA)] with us because her position required her to be there; for me that is unacceptable. So your role is simple in this: advocate, mobilize, make your voice heard. Use every opportunity to create and make an agenda out of it. Anyway, you always need to be present.

Another time, we wanted to work on poverty reduction and we had created a civil society task force to do research and make recommendations. Later on, we turned it into an organization. Anyway, we wrote a report on poverty reduction policy for the government. When they wrote the recommendations of civil society on the policy, I provided a specific recommendation addressing women's issues in relation to poverty. But when they presented the final version of the report, I sensed that they did not really want to emphasize the women part. They just did not use the term women. I raised my hand, and said we also want to add something and I gave them a list of the things I had put in my paper. At the end of the meeting, the rapporteur came up to me and said "But I did include your contribution in the report". I said yes, you did, but our needs cannot be summarized in one sentence. He responded "But Ababa, you are too demanding, you

should loosen up a bit". I said "Why do you think I am here? You think I am here for the general poverty issue? When I come as the representative of my organization, it is to make sure that you mainstream it and you integrate it. Otherwise there is no purpose in me being here". That is why we need activists everywhere, especially when you sit in parliament. In parliament there are women, the hope is that they represent women and somehow defend women's interests, but they do not necessarily talk about women's issues. Why? That is because they want to blend in and be like their men colleagues. They are afraid to be told "Oh stop acting up, you are demanding too much". They don't want to be harassed, and in order to avoid being harassed and be like the men parliamentarians they keep quiet. Therefore, whether it is a good time or not, you should stand by your principles and struggle for your cause. Of course, for some you become a nuisance, they tell you "I have heard enough about your issue, I can't stand hearing about gender issues" … Activism means to continue what you do without being discouraged by all this …

New challenges

You have to be able to continue, even when you are leading a local NGO that cannot get foreign funding and has no funds to run its programmes. If it is an activist organization, with funding problems, you cannot let it close down, somehow you have to find a way to continue your action, it can be resorting to volunteering, or continuing even if this means working with just the 10% we are allowed to. That's what we sometimes do. If people working in this organization were not activists, the easiest measure would be becoming a resident NGO. That way, you can have access to foreign funding, you stop working on rights issues and orient your mission to giving women services, either in the economic or health fields. You would still be working for women. But when we started out, the main reason for the founding of this organization we put forward was "we want to work on women's rights, we want to empower women, help them struggle for their political, economic and social rights". So how can we abandon this ideal and turn into a resident NGO just because of money problems? So, I managed to convince my partners and we registered as an Ethiopian or local NGO.

Have we suffered? Yes we have, but we are surviving and we still exist. What happens when women's rights are crushed? A while ago this dramatic violence case occurred. None of the other organizations could act because they were resident NGOs. So the women could only come to us. They wanted to know how to condemn the violence committed against women. So with us, they found this space. What if this space did not exist? Then we could not raise our voice, and let our frustration and anger be heard. The downside of women's issues nowadays is that it has all become about programmes or projects. The activism part is threatened. When Messeret researched the women's movement, I told her that the Ethiopian women's movement died when it became about programmes and projects. Hence, an NGO

works when it has funds and therefore projects. Neither activism nor the women's movement is like that. It is something you can do from everywhere, as a government officer, as a teacher or team leader, as a peasant woman farmer. So you don't have to found an NGO to become an activist.

In terms of success, when I look at the history of women's activism in other countries, I have the impression that we obtained rapidly what has taken them long years of struggle. From my experience, I can say that gender equality cannot be achieved though legal and policy reforms only. We have successfully won that battle. That was the result of two matching forces; the first is the activism of women organizations like EWLA, and other local women's associations, etc. … and the second is the political commitment of the government. Without the political commitment it might have taken us several years. But getting the real change takes a longer time.

Alem

Childhood and formative years

I was never conscious of any of the movements then [the Ethiopian Student Movement, etc. …], I think I became conscious after I came back from India; that is, after I finished my studies. All these issues such as excision, early marriage and abduction, I learned about these in my twenties when I came back to the country. I think that our conscious level is different, the same with the next generation, I don't know how it works.

I think, though, that the spirit was there. My dad who was from that era was advanced for his time. He used to cook for us; I mean, that was rare for his time. For example, every Sunday he made us start cooking, everybody, I mean my brothers also. They had a role to play in the kitchen but he was the first one to cook for us. So on Sundays it was our job. So I remember he always used to tell us, you can do anything you want. You can get to where you want. I think that was it for me. That's where it started. I strongly believed in myself, in my capacity. So we had that support.

Secondly, there are the things that you see at home, my mum was like the dad in the house, and you can say she played the role of the conventional dad. She was out with her friends; my dad was always there in the house with the kids. So the role reversal was an eye-opener in many ways. For us it was the normal thing. So that's how I grew up, knowing that this is a normal thing. The mum goes out, and they both work. While growing up we never had the traditional gender roles assigned to us. And I think it's the same with my brothers. If you go and see my brothers' households, they play the same role. They cook and participate in the household chores. They had a role model in my father, and I think it worked. I think it is important to have those within your environment. All of us, we grew up to be what we are, and our upbringing has been an influencing factor. Therefore, that support

was there throughout our formative years. I had that sense of, well, I can do it. I don't have those limitations of, oh, because I am a girl I can't do this or that.

It is outside the house, or when I go out, that I see the different treatment of girls and boys, like when you are harassed on the streets. How dare he? Who does he think he is? These are questions I discussed with my brothers. I did not do anything, so why is he doing this? The outside world was different. Because I think we were raised in a very closed family, like my father drops us everywhere. So our reality was school, home, etc. … when you go into the outside world, you are shocked at how things are. The same thing when I went to India. The shock of knowing about issues like infanticide, you know, where they kill their female babies. It was a shocker, like arranged marriage, for them it was normal. My exposure was limited to school life, and I learned those things from what the Indian students were talking about. My assumption was if I were home it would not happen to me. I was not thinking how were things in Ethiopia in general but what would have happened in my family. Then I joined the Master's in Development Studies programme. Then I got exposed to the wider world, outside my school, their community interactions, the way they live, etc. … that's when I started thinking, this does not have to be.

The path to activism

Afterwards I started questioning, what about my country? I did not know anything about my country**.** It is very embarrassing not to know. So when I came back, that's what I did. I said okay, Addis Ababa was not a good place to start. So I went outside, that's where my education started, actually. What kind of issues do we have there? And then you start questioning – why? Why am I special? I am not special; if I am here then there must be thousands, millions out there who should have the same opportunities that I have had. I think that is how it started. That's how my work focusing on women's issues begun. So I could see that there is potential but it is because the opportunities are not given, so that's how it took off. So I just followed that trend.

Then, I started learning about issues like circumcision of girls. You know about this "*maggel*" issue [like a caste system for women]. I was shocked out of my wits, which is crazy. I was working with the Manga community in Keffa. I could not believe it, we don't have castes in Ethiopia, or so I thought. But we do have those things, I just did not know it. And I started to discover that we do have different discrimination mechanisms, by gender, occupation, disability, you name it … that's when I started learning about my own country, the plight of women, the situation of women and all those different forms of oppression. On the surface, you see that they are linked to economic factors but they are interconnected. I first worked with political officials, within the greater caste community, and then there is the gender element of it. And then there was the community as a whole; you have this evil eye concept, that we call "*buda*", which was somehow connected to the whole community. That leads to the whole

community being ostracized, and within that the women being lesser. So you have to see those things from this angle. Moreover, you also have the issues linked to what we call the harmful traditional practices [HTPs], such as excision, rape, early marriage, abduction, etc. … that was one part of my work. To that, you add other violence committed against women, which was another dimension, so, my goodness!

And then you start to reconnect all those incidents, like the street harassment, etc., all those were manifestations of how violent a community could be, including the passivity, as the passer-by's look at you, not intervening when a guy grabs you without your consent. I remember once, a guy on the street wanted to grab something from me, and I was struggling because I did not want him to take it from me. I was not strong, but I remember the anger within me. It was during daylight, around 3 pm. People were passing by. He did not succeed so he just said "*derek*" [stubborn] and left [laughter]. Oh, I think it was a ring, my mum's ring that he wanted to take off my finger. I knew that if we fought I would lose, but I was just mad.

As I said, you start recalling and realize, there is a reason why men are doing that and getting away with it. The community is passive, has resigned itself to it to a certain extent. And then there are people like my father. You see, when I got home after the incident, you could see my anger on my face. He asked me what happened. After I told him, he took his car out to look for the guy. He is the kind who would run after guys who harassed us. The area I lived in, the old airport area was kind of hard at that time. Another time, on the street he saw two young girls crying, he asked them what happened. They said this guy stole from us. He took them in our car and started chasing after the thief. There are people like that; my father can't be an exception. If there is one, there are others. So that gives you hope for working on these issues, like the whole world is not violent or supporting the violence. Therefore, you appeal to that. So the question is, how can we harness this. So the work I did on violence against women, with the media, was appealing to that sense in all of us. We need to stop this violence against women, like shock people out of their comfort zone. For me it has happened in different ways. For other people we can do it in many other ways. Some people are prone to act, some people are happy to sit among their comforts and some people just don't know. We might be surprised to hear that they don't know, but a lot of people don't know things. So the role of the media is key. And then the role of the media could also be damaging. You could easily find things, you could say, what does the community learn from that? So how do you marry those and work on it?

Identifying gender issues and the prevalence of violence against girls/women

There are many issues that you can work on. At one time, we were working in one of the high schools in Addis. I felt sorry for the girls, because I was scared being in there among the boys. The stories I heard from the girls in that school were shocking. There were girls that had been raped within the confines of that school. It was a situation in

which teachers felt powerless to intervene. What do you do there? Okay, you can teach them, raise awareness, but what next? There are more issues than that, so how do you get to those kids? We can't afford to be passive. It might not be your kid today, but it could be yours tomorrow. We should reason like that, it is happening to another human being whether it is our kid or not.

Have you seen the gang-rape case in India? You see how they reacted. Do we rise up like that? The problem is, the justification for the man's action is there. If we take the example of the guy who threw acid on her face, they try to find justifications for him. The same thing with the Langano case, where the boyfriend killed his ex-girlfriend, whatever she did, it does not justify the action. That's why we have the laws. He can sue her if he wants, but he does not have the right to kill. With regard to this kind of issue of violence, the attitude of society has not changed. We still find justifications. You hear it from women as well. He should receive his penalty; justification should not be made for him. If the crime was committed against another man, would it be justified as when it is against a woman? NO. The double standard is there when the victim is a woman. That is the problem and we are still struggling with the double standard.

The role of culture in maintaining patriarchy

The other problem also lies in our culture, a very strong culture. Can you defy a society, lift your head up high and live in that society? That is the greatest challenge. So how do you balance things? I love that culture that we have of being together and supportive and all that. But at the same time, it can be so oppressive, like something breathing down your neck 24/7. So how can you say, I don't care what you think, this is my life, on certain issues. Because what pushes us to do certain things is that we think that society is against us. But at the end of the day they are not there [you are alone, taking responsibility for your actions].

Let's look at marriage celebrations, for example. For my own marriage, I decided not to have a reception. It was a big deal, with my mum and all. I had to go and say, okay, I don't want to have a reception, I also know why you want to have a ceremony. You want to invite your friends. I understand that and I said, even if I have one I won't invite your friends. So that defeats the purpose. Although my mum understands my position, she also knows how society operates and she tries to survive within that community. So they need to do that. And once you give in, you give in to lots of things.

If you take issues related to rape or spousal abuse, it is related to this. A mother could tell her daughter, we lived like that, so go back to your husband, cope. And I think that western society went through the same thing, and is still going through the same thing. And we are doing it as well. The difference may be that here we don't have many economically secure women. So they mostly depend on their husbands. So they really have to, or do they have to? And I don't want

to deny justice to those women who have gone out and managed to survive. There are women who left with their children and managed to work. Maybe they did not have the life they had, monetary wise. But if we look at the psychological part of it, are they much more satisfied with what they have now? I think we should ask these questions of those women. Do we have to stay in an abusive marriage? I don't think so and I think that is a personal decision. The minute we started talking about women's issues, the reaction was, are you encouraging women to divorce their husbands? What kind of husband do you keep? Why do you keep that husband if he is abusive to you? This is not about encouraging divorce but what society wants is, once you are married you stay married regardless of how you have been treated. So if you cannot accept this, what is the option? I remember one time we asked for a shelter for women. That request was not accepted because their assumption was, you are pushing women to separate with their husbands. Is there a problem with marriage in our country? So why would you think that everybody will run away? Why would you think that everybody is not happy with her marriage? So there is something that we know and nobody else knows? We don't have a counselling service. We have the traditional mediation mechanism, which is, I don't know, I have never been to one, if you look at it I don't know how they mediate. Maybe that is one thing we have to look at. How do they mediate? Does that really work? Or is it just "*teyewh"*, *"chayewh"*, etc. [leave him be, cope, just learn to live with it"]?

For me, we have to look forward to our children's generation. The question is whether our daughters would take it? I don't think my children would accept comments like sitting properly like a girl, doing this and doing that. We have to take into account that Addis Ababa is not a representation of the whole country. That's the dilemma**.** We raised the issue or the example of the role of the family. So to what extent can any kind of a family influence its own community? I think that nowadays community ties have become more and more fragmented here in Addis, the extended family relationship more and more loose, communication with neighbours has decreased.

Yes, now I can have a say on how I raise my children, depending on where we are. However, rural communities are practically intact, still close-knit societies. It is very difficult for a family to say I don't want to give my daughter to that person, or say I don't care whether my child is a virgin or not. Here we can still have a say, we can influence. When we go outside in rural areas, we have to consider the culture as it is. What does the culture allow, because we are still bound by the culture. I really don't believe that a family can act while disregarding what the community has to say. I have this example in the Amara region, it was a few years ago, and things may have improved since. Anyway, we were discussing early marriage. They responded, we know what the problem is, we are talking about it with our daughters, they are the ones drinking poison to kill themselves, the ones running away, etc. That's when I understood the dilemma; yes, as a family I don't want to marry off my child at the age of eight or ten. But society

does not accept it. That girl will be an outcast. Am I strong enough to say, I don't care what you think? How is she going to survive in this society without being married? That's why our actions should be linked with ongoing communication with the community we have to go and talk to the community elders, make them our entry point to see, or test how the elders or how the religious leaders would look at it to guide the whole process and define how we live. It might be easier in Addis, I think, I can raise my children as I wish. So here in Addis we can start from the family. But in rural areas, we still have to go to the elders and religious leaders, etc., to get to where we want.

Mulatwa

Formative years and educational background

I was born in Axum, in the northern part of Ethiopia. I didn't grow up there though. Because of my parent's divorce, there was a time my dad couldn't afford to keep my sister and me. So we were sent to live with relatives in a rural area for two years. Those years were crucial to my self-development. I think that's when I vowed to be a fighter and to succeed in life. I had seen what not having basic things meant. I have seen how unfair the treatment of boys and girls is. I was given more housework than the boy in the house. He got more food, more respect, more attention, but I worked hard to get attention, to study well and get recognition. If I worked hard, I knew I would get it back and I did.

The biggest influence in my life is my father. I was raised by a single father. After I started living with my father full-time, everything was easy. He is a very principled person in many ways. The things he liked and disliked have stayed constant throughout my life. He is a voracious reader and loves discussions. I learned to read books early on in life and argue with him. I learned that I am entitled to my opinions – no pressure to change my views on anything if I am not convinced the other side of the perspective is worthy. There was no physical punishment! He never raised a hand to me. He is actually a person who very rarely raised even his voice. He always reassured me that I am a fighter and will be whatever I want to be. So even at that time, when corporal punishment was the rule in schools, I was the unique student who always refused to be punished by my teachers. I would simply just walk out of a classroom and head to the principal's office to protest that no one had a right to hit me. Then they would summon my dad and he always would always confirm that, no matter what I did wrong, corporal punishment was off the table. He would tell them he would discuss the wrongs with me and get it sorted out but not through hitting. I think that's why I find it very difficult to justify domestic violence as an expression of love. I always thought that only a person who deeply hates you can hit you. That's why I make sure the first discussion with anyone I become intimate with starts with discussion of what I will never tolerate – that is, the day he lays a finger on me, I will walk out and never come back.

I didn't have much contact with my mum in my early years so I didn't know much about her beliefs. To be honest, I've never had much time with her, even up to now, so I don't know much. However, I know that she had to do the culturally unthinkable thing of leaving a child of five months old (me) and join the university. That must have taken a lot of willpower. Had she not done that, despite all the bad-mouthing from family and friends, she would still be where she was then … a high school dropout with kids. She was able to pursue her education further. Even now, at the age of 50, she has finished studying to be a registered nurse!

In high school I was very active in extracurricular activities – sports, mini-media, drama club, etc. Unlike other parents around our area, my father had no objection to me having several non-romantic male friends. We were a group of four girls and eight guys. We were very close. We were inseparable. We did everything together. All my friends could come to my house and we were free to stay at home. At that time, parents did not allow any boy to come to their house with their daughter and vice versa. Our house was unique. Anyone could come in and go out as they please. This helped me develop confidence. I didn't see boys/men as different or superior. I was into sports and a bit masculine so I had no problem fighting with them, tackling them, talking openly, etc. So there was no option in my head that there were things I couldn't do because I was a girl. I felt I could do anything, and if I don't do something it is because I don't want to do it …or have no interest in developing that skill.

Then I went to the university. Hmm … the university was another set of animals [laughter]. I thought when I joined the university I would be joining an elite group who were well read, were obsessed with ideas and discussions, and I would grow up to be a well-rounded person. My first day in the campus compound was a shock, to say the least. The male students were calling us names, unwanted contact … they were just acting horrible. I thought they must be from another planet. I couldn't believe that they got the grades to get in. Going to class revealed a lot more perverted ideas. All the chairs were covered in graffiti … of female organs. I remember being so annoyed. All the halls, toilets, library desks were the same. You could hardly go anywhere without seeing something sexual, insulting. I even thought I had made a mistake in joining the university. I decided early on, it is not going to be the place I thought it would be, so I better toughen up and just focus on developing myself. I actually lost hope in people that they would be worth speaking to or growing close to. I buried myself in my studies. The more I interacted with others, the more convinced I became that it was going to be a painful five years. My high school friends remained close, though. University is the place where I developed strong resentment of sexual harassment. I didn't read books about it, but just common sense. There is no way that people should spend time writing nasty things on the chairs and on the walls. To say the least, it was destruction of public property. Then in psychology class, I started understanding why the young do what they

do. Then slowly I started to understand that the interaction of the sexes is so governed by cultural norms that are so rigid, they weren't allowed to develop the skills for healthy interaction.

The path to feminist activism

I was lucky enough to have very strong women in my family. One of my aunts was a political activist towards the end of Haile Selassie's regime. She was one of the eight students who hijacked an aeroplane. She was the lone survivor as all the rest were assassinated inside the plane. She spent some time in prison and when the Derg took power she was able to leave the country. My other aunt was also imprisoned for five years for her political involvement. Seeing women who maintain their own ideology and make sacrifices for it is not a new concept to me. I have seen many who fought as hard as men.

Individual actions are an integral part of life. I believe that I and only I am the decision-maker in my life so every interaction in life is my decision. I do what I do every day considering it as an act that defines me. However, my involvement in collective action didn't happen until I joined EWLA. I was particularly interested in combating domestic violence, sexual harassment and divorce settlements. While in EWLA, I was involved in research and media advocacy on these issues. I think the media discussions on these issues took shape through the research we did on the issues. People paid attention and the arguments we presented were able to touch people in real ways.

I believe I am a feminist. For me, feminism is about equality, that men and women should be free to make their lives the way they want them to be. It is about fewer social restrictions and more open freedom to choose whatever they wish in life. Activism is more of an engagement for me. I believe we all are activists of one or many causes in daily life and we show where we stand always. It could be positive, in a way that challenges the social norm, or negative, in a way that reinforces the rule. Activism can be done in daily life or in a more organized way either individually or collectively. People who write on blogs and social media daily are more organized but act individually. There are others who are collective, who participate in discussions, rallies, etc. I am an activist more in daily life, and sometimes in the media and sometimes in collectives. Becoming an activist wasn't a conscious decision. It just happened. I have always been active or verbal in my day-to-day life so when I joined EWLA it opened up room to be more active, not just in my daily personal dealings but also professionally.

There wasn't a thing called feminist activism though. I remember debates in EWLA about whether EWLA was a feminist organization or not. Many people didn't like feminism, just because they feared feminism. The educated people outside EWLA saw the organization as a feminist organization but people inside didn't see it as such. The first time I started questioning why we were scared to be associated with feminism was when I saw Sehin (who is the coordinator of the Setaweets now) in one of the public rallies we organized. She wore a

T-shirt that said “This is what a feminist looks like”. I liked the boldness and started talking to people about it. I was surprised to hear that most of the rally organizers were unhappy to see that. They feared the society might think we were lesbians who were here to challenge religion. There wasn't any discourse on what feminism is and how our movement is or isn’t ideologically different from feminism principles or schools of thought. We took up the discussion again at the EWLA office but it wasn't taken seriously. Even the word feminism is not liked.

Collective action is a challenge in Ethiopia in all respects, not just for feminism. Not many people are interested in getting together for a common cause and staying on the road for the long haul. Engagement for a few days is okay, but when it takes longer and when it involves a lot of dialogue, it breaks. I have seen some groups formed and dismantled in a few months’ time. The discussions are based on personal opinions, not rooted in good understanding of literature – that is, the discussions are not on which ideology to buy into. Consensus building is most challenging. What I wish to see changed in Ethiopia is to have a good body of literature about feminism in one of the local languages flourishing in study groups and universities. The only way men and women hear about feminism is through second-hand information, especially from teachers, and often it is a distorted version. The focus is often on how most of the feminists are lesbians. That leads students to develop fear of the concept and deter them from exploring further. Absence of easy-to-read and well-presented feminist books makes it worse. When I saw bell hooks’ book *Feminism is for everyone*, I remember I was very happy. I had a plan to translate the book into Amharic but the task of even translating feminism was daunting and I never got past the cover page. I wish to see more men and women come together to develop literature in local languages and make it available widely.

In recent times I can say I am more of a personal life activist than one with wider engagement. I am developing a sense of fatigue with small group meetings, which do not have a broader engagement strategy. I used to write on social media sometimes but I see that as a lost cause as well. There is a lot of negativity and unhealthy discussion. Everything goes to character assassination so fast, the message or the key issue is peripheral. I see people are more receptive of writings that are humorous than discussion on ideologies. I remember an article, which was called “I am a wife but I need a wife”, which talks about how as a wife and employee, a woman has to do it all and how the husband is often the one who has it easy. It was written in a way to spark humour and many people liked it. Both men and women are in a defensive mood … women want to distance themselves from anything that talks about women or feminism and men think everything written is to bash them.